

**Unit 23 Working Group Meeting
January 30-31, 2009 – Kotzebue, Alaska
Meeting Summary**

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1.0 Introduction

The Unit 23 Working Group met on January 30-31, 2009, in Kotzebue, Alaska, at the Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) Assembly Chambers. A subgroup also traveled to Shungnak on January 28 to attend a public meeting hosted by the Upper Kobuk Fish and Game Advisory Committee (AC) (See Attachment 4).

The Unit 23 Working Group was formed in 2008 to discuss fall hunting conflicts between local hunters, nonlocal hunters and commercial operators (guides, transporters) in Game Management Unit (GMU) 23, in northwest Alaska.¹ The group is working together by consensus, to develop solutions to fall hunting conflicts. The group’s advisory recommendations are sent to regulatory boards, land and wildlife management agencies, and others to evaluate and consider for implementation. Working Group members are listed in Attachment 1. Jan Caulfield facilitated the meeting,² assisted by Mark Burch of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

The objectives of the January 2009 meeting were to:

- Review progress since October 2008 meeting.
- Discuss public comments from Upper Kobuk AC and residents who attended the January 28 meeting in Shungnak.
- Discuss member’s thoughts on the process so far and the highest priority topics to address.

¹ This was the third Unit 23 Working Group meeting. See Unit 23 project web site for additional information and meeting summaries: www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=planning.unit23

² Jan Caulfield, Unit 23 Facilitator, 114 S. Franklin St., Ste. 202, Juneau, AK 99801, 907-523-4610, janc@gci.net

- Work toward advisory recommendations from the Working Group and/or identify additional work that needs to be done. Consider opportunities to make changes for the 2009 hunting season, as well as longer-term opportunities.
- Hear public comment (in person and through toll-free call-in)

Section 2.0 presents seven consensus agreements reached by the Working Group at this meeting and follow-up assignments. Section 3.0 is a general summary of topics discussed; Section 4.0 gives notice of future meeting dates and possible discussion topics. Public comments are summarized in Section 5.0.

All Working Group meetings are open to the public. The January meeting was broadcast on public radio station KOTZ (including web broadcast) from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. each day. Attachment 2 lists members of the public and agency staff who attended and/or provided comment. The meeting agenda is in Attachment 3. Notes from the January 28, 2009, meeting in Shungnak are in Attachment 4.

The Working Group is scheduled to meet next on April 23-24, 2009, in Kotzebue at the NWAB Assembly Chambers. The group also plans to meet after the fall 2009 hunting season.

2.0 Consensus Recommendations – Next Steps and Assignments

At its January 30-31, 2009 meeting, the Working Group reached consensus agreement on seven recommendations to address fall hunting conflicts in Unit 23, and committed to “next steps and assignments.” The issue of fall hunting conflicts in Unit 23 is very complex; the Working Group has been discussing a wide range of actions that could possibly help reduce or resolve conflicts.

Some actions recommended by the Working Group are relatively simple and non-controversial and could be accomplished before the 2009 hunting season (such as improving pre-season communication among agencies, communities and commercial service providers). Other recommendations – such as changes to laws or regulations, or completion of management plans – would take longer to accomplish and would have to be approved by other entities (such as the Board of Game).

The Board of Game will be considering regulations affecting Unit 23 in November 2009. The Working Group has been considering possible regulation changes to propose for Board action to reduce hunting conflicts, and will continue discussing possible proposals at the group’s April 2009 meeting.

Agreements / Recommendations – January 2009 Meeting

At its January 30-31, 2009 meeting, the Unit 23 Working Group reached consensus agreement on seven recommendations:

2.1 Amend Proposal to Board of Game for Noatak Controlled Use Area Dates

At its October 2008 meeting, the Working Group had agreed to propose to the Board of Game to extend the dates of the closure to the use of aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) to August 1 - September 30 (from the current dates of August 25-September 15).

In January, the Working Group agreed to amend the dates in the proposal to August 8 – October 8, to address the generally later migration of caribou through the Noatak CUA. Enoch Mitchell reconfirmed the importance of this change in the CUA to the people of Noatak.

The proposal will be submitted for consideration at the Board of Game’s November 2009 meeting. If approved, the revised dates for the Noatak CUA would take effect for the 2010 hunting season.

Assignment: Jim Dau will amend the regulatory proposal and circulate it to the Working Group. The proposal must be submitted to the Board of Game by August 21, 2009. It should be submitted in a package with any other proposals to the Board developed by the Working Group (See 2.2, below).³

2.2 Draft Proposal to Board of Game for an Interim CUA for the Squirrel and Aggie River Areas

The Working Group agreed to develop a draft proposal to the Board of Game to establish an “interim” CUA for the Squirrel and Aggie River areas. This will be **discussed further at the Working Group’s April 2009 meeting.** The Squirrel River area (Guide Use Area [GUA] 23-06) experiences the highest density of nonlocal hunters, with an average of 3.61 nonlocal hunters per hundred-square-miles from 1998-2007.⁴

Law enforcement agency aerial surveys conducted in 2006-2008 confirm the high prevalence of hunter camps in GUA 23-06. Public comments also identify the Squirrel, Aggie and Eli River drainages as areas of high use by nonlocal hunters, and express concerns about potential deflection of migrating caribou that may affect down-migration hunting by local communities.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing a Recreation Management Plan for its lands in the Squirrel River area. The Working Group will also be requesting that the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) be a cooperator in this planning process for State lands in the area (See 2.3, below). However, agency planning processes will take several years to complete. In the interim, the Working Group may propose a CUA or other regulatory tools to manage this high use area.

Assignment: Subgroup includes: Jim Dau (lead), Shelly Jacobson, Pete Schaeffer, Mike Fleagle and Cliff Judkins. Joe Schuster or Kerry Cope, and

³ Note: If the Working Group intends to submit a companion proposal to the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB), it would need to be submitted April 30, 2009, for FSB consideration at its January 2010 meeting; the federal regulation would take effect July 2010.

⁴ The next most intensively used area (GUA 23-05) averaged 2.36 nonlocal hunters per hundred-square-miles; other GUAs ranged from 0.27 – 1.48).

Charlie Gregg will also be asked to serve on the subgroup. The Working Group will discuss the ideas presented by the subgroup at its April 2009 meeting.

The proposal must be submitted to the Board of Game by August 21. It should be submitted in a package with any other proposals to the Board developed by the Working Group (See 2.1, above).

2.3 Request State of Alaska Participation as a Cooperator in Preparation of Squirrel River Management Plan

The Working Group agreed to request that the State of Alaska cooperate with BLM in development of a management plan for the Squirrel River area. The request will be made to the DNR Director of Mining, Land and Water, with copies to the Commissioner of DNR and the Office of the Governor. The letter should address the concern that the State must be involved in coordinated management solutions in Unit 23, to ensure that user conflicts are not simply transferred from one area of the region, or one land ownership, to another.

Assignment: Jan Caulfield will draft letter to DNR (coordinate with Dianna Leinberger and Shelly Jacobson on the draft letter.)

2.4 Present Comments to BGCSB Regarding Unit 23 Issues, at March 2009 Meeting

The Working Group requested that a comment letter be sent to the BGCSB Chair and presented to the BGCSB at its March 11-12, 2009, meeting addressing the following points regarding Unit 23 user conflict issues:

- Brief BGCSB on legislation being developed by Rep. Joule's office to give the Board authority to regulate big game transporter numbers and use areas and to change the definition of "transportation services" to include air taxis that provide big game hunting services as an incidental portion of their business.
- Request that when guide concession areas are established (and possibly transporter concession areas in the future), the State provide a mechanism to exclude specific areas from commercial use when appropriate.
- Recommend that the Board close loopholes that substantially weaken its ability to manage the number and intensity of commercial services in an area (e.g., allowing guides to work in additional GUAs through subcontracting arrangements).
- Request that beginning in 2009, the Board require guides and transporters in Unit 23 to report latitude & longitude of where they drop off and pick up hunters on hunt records and transporter activity reports.

Assignment: Jan Caulfield will draft letter, in consultation with Ted Spraker (BGCSB member), Phil Driver and Lee Anne Ayres.

2.5 Identify Areas Where Commercial Uses May Not be Appropriate

At the January meeting, the Working Group discussed identifying specific areas in Unit 23 where commercial services may not be allowed, with a focus on areas particularly important for local communities' hunting. The Working Group discussed several possible ways that a separation of commercial and non-commercial hunting in these

selected areas could be done, possibly including:

- Excluding specific areas from the guide concession areas being developed by the Big Game Commercial Services Board (which at this time only addresses guides, but may in the future also address transporters).
- Federal agency consideration of establishing some commercial-free zones in the recreation and land planning processes underway on lands managed by NPS, BLM & USFWS.

Assignment: The group thought that Maniilaq Association may be the most appropriate party to work with the villages to identify specific areas that are particularly important for local communities' hunting.

2.6 Meat Donation

The Working Group has heard that some villages may be interested in receiving donated meat from willing guides/transporters, provided they were confident of the meat's quality. There may be more that the Working Group can do to facilitate this type of meat donation, if it would be welcome.

Assignment: The NWAB indicated that it will contact villages to see if there is interest in facilitating donation of meat in the villages.

2.7 Agency Coordination – Planning and Management

The Working Group asked that the federal land management agencies (BLM, USFWS, NPS) to continue to coordinate permitting, planning and enforcement to the maximum extent possible, as detailed in Section 3.5, below.

3.0 Summary of Working Group Discussion

This section provides a brief summary of Working Group discussion at the January 30-31 meeting. (See Agenda in Attachment 3).

3.1 Introductions & Opening Remarks

The meeting opened with introductions of Working Group members and people in attendance. Jan Caulfield, Facilitator, reviewed the meeting objectives and agenda. The Working Group decided to amend the agenda to provide additional time for public comment.

3.2 Progress on Working Group Recommendations from October 2008 Meeting

The following work has been done to follow through on Working Group recommendations from the October 2008 meeting:

- Proposal to Board of Game – Extend Dates of Noatak CUA. A proposal has been drafted to extend the dates of the Noatak CUA. (See 2.1, above; the Working Group revisited this recommendation and is now proposing the CUA dates be extended to August 8 – October 8.)

- Recommend BGCSB Have Statutory Authority to Regulate Transporters. As directed at the October 2008 meeting, the Working Group sent a letter to Representative Reggie Joule and Senator Donny Olson requesting that the BGCSB be given statutory authority to: (1) regulate transporter numbers and use areas, (2) modify the statutory definition for “transportation services” (AS 08.54.790(10)) to require that air taxi operators who transport clients for big game hunting as an “incidental portion of its business” file a transporter activity report and comply with other regulations that address big game transportation services; and (3) increase BGCSB staffing. Rep. Joule is preparing to submit a House Bill to the Alaska State Legislature. At its January meeting, the Working Group asked Pete Schaeffer to be the main contact for Rep. Joule’s office.
- Agency Coordination – Planning and Management. At the request of the Working Group, the federal land management agencies are working closely to coordinate planning and management to provide an integrated and consistent approach to addressing hunting conflicts on federal land in Unit 23. (See Section 3.5 for status and next steps.)
- Conduct Public Meeting in Shungnak. Several Working Group and staff met with the Upper Kobuk AC and the public in Shungnak on January 28. Twenty-four members of the public attended, including several people from Ambler and Kobuk. Working Group members expressed appreciation for the public interest and discussion. The meeting notes are in Attachment 4.

3.3 Roundtable Discussion

During a roundtable session early in the January meeting, Working Group members discussed their views on the Group’s progress to date and what they thought were the one or two essential things to accomplish with this group. The discussion was very wide-ranging; however, it did help the Working Group focus in on a number of recommendations (See Section 2.0, above.)

The following are comments made by Working Group members, grouped under general topic areas (not listed in any order of priority). The following are not consensus points – but reflect the comments of individual members.

Need to Make a Difference in 2009

- Many of the possible solutions that the Working Group is recommending will take years to accomplish. Need to also focus on what can be done to make a difference in the 2009 hunting season.

Solutions Need to be Combination of smaller, short-term steps and bigger, long-term steps

Local Hunting – Meeting Subsistence Needs

- Local hunters need to be able to successfully get what community’s need for subsistence, without disturbance and conflict – especially when costs of food and fuel are so high.

- Identify specific area(s) for each community in which methods and means are controlled – and possibly restrict commercial services in such areas – to allow local hunters to get what they need.
- Caribou need space to be able to establish their migration before they are hunted. This is important to local hunting success.

Managing Levels of Nonlocal Hunting – to Manage Conflicts

- How can we provide access and fit in appropriate levels of nonlocal hunting, in a way that does not cause conflict with local hunters?
- Need to come to terms with and manage the number of visiting hunters on the ground in Unit 23. Can we determine some general level or range of how many nonlocal hunters can be accommodated, with no or low levels of conflict? (Might be areas of Unit 23 that are already too crowded, but other areas that can readily accommodate more use without conflicts.)
- Recognize that just managing the number of guides or transporters will not necessarily reduce or control the number of hunters on the ground; the number of clients would need to be managed.
- Current regulations have “loopholes” that make it difficult to manage levels of commercial use (for example, guides can work outside of the GUAs in which they are registered via subcontracts; transporter numbers and use areas are unregulated; air taxis that fly hunters incidental to their main business are not considered to be transporters).
- Possible tools for managing levels and locations of nonlocal hunting that were mentioned in discussion include:
 - CUAs
 - Manage the numbers of commercial guides and transporters, and the areas in which they operate (e.g., through federal management plans, or through BGCSB regulations)
 - Drawing permit hunts for non-Alaska residents
 - Later season start for non-Alaska residents (e.g., on river corridors)
 - Establish early subsistence-only hunt prior to general hunt
 - Require early registration in Kotzebue for fall resident permit hunt (as is done for moose)
- It seems that there is progress on issues related to improving the *behaviors* of nonlocal hunters, but not on the numbers of nonlocal hunters in the field.
- Agencies should actively use the authorities they already have to protect and provide for subsistence hunting (e.g., ANILCA).

Coordinated Management & Enforcement

- It is essential to coordinate management actions, so we don’t just “move the problems around the region.”
- State of Alaska must be an active partner with the federal agencies in addressing user conflicts through planning and permitting – cannot rely on federal agencies to do this, especially since the State owns and manages many areas that are heavily used (e.g., areas used for access river corridors, lands in heavily-visited Squirrel/Aggie drainages)

- However, “caution” that the State has limited staff and resources for planning, permitting and enforcement, and operates under a general policy of open access to public lands; current focus of State management is on impacts to the land, not on social impacts.
- Concern that increased restrictions on federal lands will increase the problem on State lands, including lands along river corridors that are very important for local hunters – and that State will be unprepared to address the conflicts that will occur.
- Important to coordinate enforcement – including with local entities.

Meat Donation

- There may be interest in the villages in receiving more donated meat, provided it is of high quality. But, it is important to speak first with the villages regarding their interest before making any recommendations.

Local Economic Benefits

- The Kotzebue IRA has indicated they have no interest in operating a meat processing facility.

Working Group Process and Public Involvement

- Provide translator for Working Group meetings
- Hold Working Group meeting(s) outside of Kotzebue
- Actively involve communities in the Working Group process – and in the federal agency planning processes that are now underway (See Section 3.5)

Other Comments and Concerns

- It is important to have reasonable expectations about the outcomes of this Working Group process – it can take many years for changes to occur.
- Concern that the Working Group’s recommendations won’t be followed by Board of Game and others.
- Concern that people who are dependent on subsistence resources are not represented on decision-making bodies such as the Board of Game; the Board does not come to local areas to meet, so local people are not able to participate effectively.
- Substantial local frustration with the conflict between the State Constitution and ANILCA with regard to providing a priority for meeting local subsistence needs.

3.4 Update on Guide Concession Program

Dianna Leinberger gave an update on the guide concession program being developed by the Alaska DNR. DNR is developing a Guide Concession Program to be administered by its Division of Mining, Land & Water (DMLW) through its authority to issue permits or leases for use of State lands. At the next BGCSB meeting on March 10-12, 2009 in Fairbanks, the Board will work to provide a recommendation to DNR on big game guide concession areas (size, location) and the number of guides per concession area.

The DMLW intends to propose the Guide Concession program for public review in 2009 (including proposed regulation changes). Public comments will be taken in writing; no public hearings are planned. The DMLW would like to accept applications from guides

in 2010 for the 2011 season. For more information: contact Clark Cox, DMLW Southcentral Region at clark.cox@alaska.gov or 907-269-8565.

The Working Group discussed whether excluding specific areas of Unit 23 from the guide concession areas would be an appropriate tool to separate commercial from non-commercial hunting activity in selected areas, particularly in areas important for local communities' hunting (See 2.5, above). The Group also discussed the importance of expanding the concession program to also manage transporter activity in the future.

3.5 Federal Agency Coordination – Response to Working Group Request

At its October 2008 meeting, the Working Group asked that the federal land management agencies (BLM, USFWS, NPS) coordinate their planning and management to the maximum extent possible (and coordinate with the State of Alaska), to provide an integrated and consistent approach to addressing user conflicts in Unit 23. The agencies have been meeting to follow-through on this request. They presented the following information at the January 30-31 meeting.

Permitting

- Permit issuance – In 2009, the NPS will continue its interim limits on the number of big game hunting guides, transporters and clients in the Noatak National Preserve. USFWS will limit the number of guides and transporters operating in the Selawik Refuge, but will not limit the number of clients served by transporters. BLM will continue its permits for guides; the agency will also begin issuing permits for transporters in the Squirrel River area in 2009, but will not set limits on the number of transporters or clients until a Recreation Management Plan is completed.
- Permit conditions – The three federal agencies distributed a draft core set of permit conditions that would apply to guide and transporter activities on federal lands (with each agency adding on additional stipulations as required.) The agencies will review these stipulations with the NWAB.

(Note: In Working Group discussion, it was noted that guides can be held accountable for clients' behavior on the ground [e.g., re: properly caring for trash and human waste at camps], but that unguided hunters must take individual responsibility for compliance with State and federal agency regulations regarding trash disposal, etc. The NWAB is considering using its land use permit authorities to address these types of issues.)

- Activity reports – Beginning in 2009, the federal agencies will all require transporters to submit a copy of the State's transporter activity report, and will require the transporters to provide the latitude and longitude of where they drop off and pick up hunters. The report due date will be February 15 of each year.
- Share information regarding permitted activities – The agencies will routinely share information about permits issued, completed activity reports, enforcement actions, etc.
- Post-Season Evaluation – The agencies will evaluate each permitted operation after the season and share information about any issues that arose; federal agencies will

check in with ADF&G, NWAB and the Troopers regarding any public complaints they received.

Pre-Season Communication

- Pre-Season Information Packet – To follow through on an earlier Working Group recommendation, the federal agencies will work with the State, NWAB and guide/transporter representatives on the Working Group to develop a packet of information that will be distributed to all guides and transporters prior to each hunting season. The packet will include information to help businesses comply with regulations and permit conditions and reduce hunting conflicts. In this way, all commercial service providers (including those not based in Kotzebue) will receive the same comprehensive information.
- Pre-Season Meeting for Communities – The federal agencies have suggested that the NWAB sponsor an annual pre-season meeting for the public (including phone connections to communities), so that agencies can tell the public which guides and transporters have received permits to work in different areas in Unit 23. This will help the public know what to expect with regard to commercial businesses operating in their areas during the hunting season.

Law Enforcement Coordination

- The federal agencies are increasing their coordination for enforcement. NPS is also pursuing cross-deputization with the State of Alaska, which will allow them to be able to enforce on State and private lands. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the agencies that needs to be updated.
- The federal agencies will participate in NANA's trespass officer training each July, to educate, update and coordinate staff – with an emphasis on enforcing permit conditions.
- Federal law enforcement staff will also meet in August to share a list of permitted operators and in-season contact numbers/plane numbers.
- BLM is looking into developing cooperative agreements with NPS and/or USFWS to benefit from their more extensive law enforcement staff and pilots. BLM and NPS intend to work together on enforcement on BLM lands in the Squirrel River area.
- George Helfrich gave a summary of NPS' enforcement work in 2008. NPS had two rangers in the field, using fixed-wing aircraft, boats and helicopters. The rangers visited more than 60 camps and spoke with more than 120 hunters on public lands. The focus was on licenses, permits, clean camps, proper meat care, and ways to minimize impacts to local hunters.
- Dan Peterson, NPS, noted that enforcement officers take reports of concern from local residents very seriously and actively pursue them. He noted that there has been a marked improvement in meat care in the field; more use of cloth bags, more meat hanging.
- The Working Group noted that it is essential that all enforcement officers receive cross-cultural training before they work in the field.

Planning

- Each of the federal agencies is preparing plans for the lands they manage in Unit 23, which must follow specific processes and timelines, and meet different agency mandates. The plans include:
 - BLM – Squirrel River Recreation Management Plan
 - NPS – Big Game Commercial Services Management Plan
 - USFWS – Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Selawik Refuge
- The agencies are considering a zone concept for managing levels and types of commercial use on federal lands in Unit 23. In the planning process, the Working Group could have a role of suggesting areas to include in zones where commercial services would not be allowed, or would be allowed only under specified conditions; as well as to recommend the types of conditions that should be applied in different areas or zones.
- The federal agencies and the Working Group discussed the importance of having the State DNR participate in planning and permitting, to avoid just moving guide and transporter activity off of federal land (where such activity may be limited) and onto State land. (See 2.4, above, regarding recommendation to DNR.)
- As part of its planning process, the BLM contracted with the University of Alaska to conduct surveys of non-local hunters who hunted in the Squirrel River area in 2008, and a mail survey of hunters who hunted in the Squirrel River area in 2006-2008. Focus groups and interviews were also conducted in Kiana and Noorvik. BLM will share the full results with the Working Group when they are available. It may be beneficial to repeat this survey in additional communities and again in the future, to establish a regional baseline and to measure any change over time in the public's perception of user conflicts and other issues related to hunting.
- The Working Group emphasized the importance of active public involvement in the planning processes.

4.0 Future Meeting Schedule

The Working Group will meet on April 23-24, 2009, in Kotzebue. (NOTE: This is a change from the previous data in early April.) At the April meeting, the group will follow-up on work outlined in Section 2, above, including further discussion of potential proposals to the Board of Game (due to the Board in August), discussion of specific areas important to local communities' hunting, regional interest in meat donation, and actions that can be implemented in 2009 (e.g., federal agency permit and enforcement coordination, enhanced briefing of guides and transporters regarding avoiding user conflicts, pre-season briefing for villages.)

5.0 Public Comments

The public was invited to comment on Friday, January 30 and Saturday, January 31. Comments were welcomed from people attending the meeting in Kotzebue, as well as through a toll-free telephone line. Written comment forms were also provided, for people to complete and mail-in at their convenience. The following points were during the public

comment periods. Comments are grouped under general topic headings, and are not listed in any order of priority.

Importance of Subsistence Hunting and Local Foods

- Subsistence priority for rural residents is essential.
- Need to fully consider the federal subsistence priority provided by ANILCA in the group's discussion and in solutions. The Federal Subsistence Board and federal agencies have authorities under ANILCA to solve user conflicts in Unit 23.
- Subsistence way of life and foods are essential to local residents. Need to ensure that the resources we've used in the past continue to be available to us.
- All villages are being affected.
- Appreciative of Working Group members' comments recognizing local community subsistence uses.
- What is on the table for our children is what is most important.
- Native sovereignty is essential issue.
- Caribou are not as fat as they were in the 1970's. Concern they are not eating right.

Concerns about disruption of caribou

- Transporters are dropping hunters in caribou migration areas; concern that this is affecting routes.
- Need to let first group of caribou cross the river to avoid disruption of migration.
- Question regarding whether sport hunting is causing change in migration patterns. (Response: ADFG noted that there is not possible to document whether this is occurring, since there is only a small number of caribou each year that are tracked with radio collars).
- Our grandfathers taught us how to hunt and to understand caribou and other wildlife. Planes disturb and scatter migrating caribou. Need to wait in river for caribou to cross; let females cross and wait for bulls.
- When younger, used to hunt caribou up by Anaktuvuk Pass; now the caribou migrate through different areas.

Comments on regulation of hunters and commercial businesses (guides, transporters)

- Need to focus on regulation of transporter services.
- Transporters should be responsible for their clients' behavior on the ground; for example, transporters ensure that camp sites used by clients are clean after use. Different clients repeatedly use the same sites.
- The "core permit stipulations" being considered for use on federal agency permits should include measures that were in the 2008 letter from the Working Group to guides and transporters, including setting camps five miles apart, flying at higher elevations to avoid disturbance, and setting camps on the south side of the rivers.
- Concern that advertisements showcase trophy hunting in Unit 23.
- Management should focus on air transporter businesses – levels of use, numbers of clients, etc.

- State of Alaska and NWAB should co-manage transporter use.

User Conflicts

- Need to limit the nonlocal hunters in the area during the fall hunting season.
- Airplanes fly too low, disturb caribou and hunting.
- Planes can go into CUAs during hunting season, if they are not providing transportation for hunters. These flights cause disturbance, but are not restricted.
- Nonlocal hunters sometimes trespass on private lands.

Meat handling and waste

- Meat needs to be well taken care of.
- Concern that nonlocal hunters do not properly care for and waste meat.
- Hunters should bring meat out of the field within three days.
- Meat donations would likely be welcome, but must ensure that it is high quality.
- Suggest that there be a “donation tag” that would be completed by hunters who would like to donate meat, that indicates when the meat was harvested, how long it was in the field, weather in the field, etc.
- (Response: KOTZ serves as a clearinghouse for meat donation in Kotzebue. ADFG REMINDER – Inspect meat before you accept it. Do not accept bad meat. Report spoiled meat to Troopers.)

Possible local economic and other benefits to the region

- Local people should guide hunters by boat; this would reduce aircraft disturbance, provide work for local people, ensure higher quality meat care and make meat donations to communities easier.
- More local people should be hired as guide assistants.

Comments on Unit 23 Working Group process

- Request that a translator be provided so elderly hunters can completely understand what the Working Group is saying.
- Important that local people comment to the Working Group. Call-in during meetings.
- Working Group should include local ACs. (Response: Each AC does have a representative on the Working Group.)
- Need to make a plan to address user conflicts; do things differently.

Other

- Freeze-thaw in mid-winter causes ground to freeze; makes it difficult for caribou to find food.
- Concern that caribou may be declining because of contamination from Project Chariot. (Response: ADFG responded that veterinarian examined WACH caribou in 2007 and found them to be in the best shape of any caribou in the state. Necropsies of caribou that died-off in 1994-95 and 1999-2000 indicated they had starved. The herd has been examined for contaminants to respond to local concerns about the potential effects of Project Chariot or mining. No heavy metals, isotopes or other contaminants have been found in the meat.

Unit 23 Working Group Membership & Attendance at January 2009 Meeting

Name	Affiliations
Lee Anne Ayres	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kerry Cope (unable to attend)	Big Game Commercial Services Board
Jim Dau	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Reggie Cleveland (unable to attend)	representing: Upper Kobuk Advisory Committee
Phil Driver	Alaska Professional Hunting Association Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Mike Fleagle	Federal Subsistence Board
Charlie Gregg	Northwest Arctic Borough
George Helfrich	National Park Service
Shelly Jacobson	Bureau of Land Management
Cliff Judkins	Board of Game
Victor Karmun	Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Kotzebue Sound Advisory Committee
Dianna Leinberger	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Enoch Mitchell	Noatak/Kivalina Advisory Committee
Ron Moto	North Seward Peninsula Advisory Committee
Walter Sampson	NANA Regional Corporation
Pete Schaeffer	Kotzebue Sound Advisory Council
Joe Schuster (unable to attend)	Alaska Professional Hunting Association Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Hazel Smith (unable to attend)	Maniilaq
Ted Spraker (unable to attend)	Board of Game Big Game Commercial Services Board
Raymond Stoney	Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Lower Kobuk Advisory Committee Big Game Commercial Services Board Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Alex Whiting (unable to attend)	Kotzebue IRA

Public & Agency Attendance List
Unit 23 Working Group Meeting
January 30-31, 2009 – Kotzebue, Alaska

Name	Affiliation
Jeff Brooks	USFWS
Susan Bucknell	ADF&G
Helen Clough	USFWS
Lantz Dahlke	Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Kelly Egger	Bureau of Land Management
Jeff Hadley	public
Cyrus Harris	Maniilaq
Dave Howell	BLM
Marci Johnson	National Park Service
Adrienne Lindholm	USNPS
Paul Randall	Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Enoch Shield	public
Patrick Snow	USFWS
Abraham Snyder	NANA Regional Corporation
Dan Stevenson	National Park Service
Charlotte Westing	ADF&G
Mayor Siikauraq Whiting	NWAB

Public comments presented by:

Alan Conwell
David Fields, Noorvik
Cyrus Harris, Kotzebue
Ella Leavitt
Marlene Moto, Deering
Vernetta Nay Moberly, Kotzebue
Randy Mulluk, Noorvik
Chuck Schaeffer, Ivik
Attamuk Shiedt, Sr., Kotzebue
Sky Starkey, NWAB Attorney
Alan Upicksoun, Kotzebue
Bobby Wells, Noorvik
Claude Wilson, Sr., Kotzebue
Dolly Wilson, Deering
Russell (full name & community unknown)

Unit 23 Working Group January 30-31, 2009

Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly Chambers
9:00 am – 5:00 p.m. each day

Public ration station KOTZ will broadcast the meeting from approximately 9:00 a.m. –2:30 p.m. each day. Tune to 89.9 FM or AM 720, or listen via the web at www.kotz.org

AGENDA

(Note: This version reflects changes made at meeting)

Meeting Objectives

- Review progress since October 2008 meeting
- Discuss meeting with Upper Kobuk AC and residents (January 28, Shungnak)
- Working Group roundtable discussion – Share information & updates
- Discuss issues – Work toward advisory recommendations from the Working Group and/or identify additional work that needs to be done – (Consider opportunities to make changes for the 2009 hunting season, as well as longer-term opportunities)
- Public comment session – Friday, January 30, 1:15-2:15 pm
- Discuss Working Group members' thoughts on the process – ways to improve

Friday, January 30

Coffee/Refreshments

9:00 a.m. Welcome, Introductions

- Member & audience introductions (Attachment 1)
- Review agenda, meeting objectives – Revise as needed to address Working Group direction (Attachment 2)

9:15 a.m. Between-Meeting Progress

- *Draft* Proposal to Board of Game regarding change in Noatak Controlled Use Area (Attachment 3)
- Letter from Working Group to Representative Reggie Joule & Senator Donald Olson regarding BGCSB regulation of hunting transporters & definition of air taxis (Attachment 4)

10:00 a.m. Break

- 10:15 a.m. Informal Roundtable Discussion & Topic Update – All Working Group members**
- Share information & updates.
- Meeting with Upper Kobuk Advisory Committee and public in Shungnak on January 28 – identify issues/opportunities group should discuss
 - Other topics
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch**
- 1:15 p.m. Public Comment Opportunity – Telephone Call-In & In-person comments**
- To provide comments by phone, dial 1-800-315-6338, enter code 23#.
Time per comment will be limited, to ensure opportunity for those who want to speak.
- 2:15 p.m. Break**
- 2:30 p.m. Informal “work session” – Working Group response on how the process is going and recommendations for the future**
- What is going well?
 - What should be improved?
 - What are the one or two things you think are essential to accomplish with this group?
- 5:00 p.m. Adjourn for evening**

Saturday, January 31

Coffee/Refreshments

- 9:00 a.m. Welcome – Announcements – Review Agenda/Tasks for the Day**
- 9:15 a.m. Federal Agency Coordination - Response to Working Group Request**
- Report from federal agencies on their response to the Working Group’s request (at October meeting) that they coordinate planning and management to better address user conflicts on federal lands – including coordination with the Borough and Alaska Department of Natural Resources
 - Working Group discussion & recommendations
- 10:30 a.m. Break**

- 11:00 a.m. Additional Public Comment Opportunity – Telephone Call-In & In-person comments**
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch**
- 1:15 p.m. Discussion of Issues – At the October meeting, the Working Group asked that the following issues be discussed at the January meeting:**
- Further discussion of ways to reduce user conflicts or disturbance of hunting activity and success (for example, discussion of total hunter numbers, hunter distribution, hunter or camp density, and/or behaviors)
 - Discussion of additional topics identified during this meeting
- 2:30 p.m. Break**
- 3:00 p.m. Continue Discussion**
- 4:00 p.m. Wrap-up / Summary / Future Meeting Schedule**
- Future Meeting Schedule (April 23-24, 2009 - Kotzebue)
 - Tasks, actions, schedule – to follow-up on agreements from this meeting and to prepare for next meeting(s)
- 5:00 p.m. Adjourn**

**Unit 23 Working Group
Public Meeting in Shungnak
January 28, 2009**

Members of the Unit 23 Working Group traveled to Shungnak on January 28, 2009, to attend a public meeting hosted by the Upper Kobuk Fish and Game Advisory Committee (AC). Working group members attending the meetings included: Cliff Judkins, Shelly Jacobson, Jim Dau and Phil Driver. Staff attendance included Jan Caulfield (Unit 23 facilitator), Mark Burch (Alaska Department of Fish and Game [ADF&G]), Kelly Egger (Bureau of Land Management [BLM]), Dianna Leinberger (Alaska Department of Natural Resources [DNR]) and Dave Krupa (National Park Service).

Twenty-four people attended the Shungnak meeting, including several people from Ambler and Kobuk. Major points of discussion at the meeting are summarized in this document.

Sally Custer welcomed the group. After introductions, Jan Caulfield, Unit 23 facilitator, explained that the Unit 23 Working Group wants to hear specific information from residents of the Upper Kobuk region about what types of conflicts are experienced and suggested solutions for resolving these conflicts. She summarized some of points of agreement that the Working Group had reached at its first two meetings, including:

1. Submitting a proposal to the Board of Game to lengthen the dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area,
2. Requesting that the Alaska Legislature expand the authority of the Big Game Commercial Services Board to regulate transporters and air taxis that transport hunters,
3. Asking the federal land management agencies to coordinate with one another (and with the State DNR and the Northwest Arctic Borough) in addressing hunting conflicts through permitting and planning, and
4. Trying to improve communication with commercial guides, transporters and their clients about meat care and ways to reduce hunting conflicts (e.g., pre-season briefing for guides and transporters, letter regarding voluntary steps, brochure).

Status of Caribou Herd and Harvest Data

Jim Dau, ADF&G Area Biologist provided information on the caribou herd:

- The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) population has declined from 490,000 in the 2003 to 377,000 in 2007. This is a 6% annual decline in four years; there was an 18% annual decline in the 1970s. The department plans to census the herd again in 2009.
- The December 2006 winter may be a cause, as the herd lost 31% of its animals that year, due to a period of thaw/rain/icing. The effects of a similar thaw/rain event this year are unknown.
- Since 2000, the caribou migration is generally about two to six weeks later than it used to be. This is affecting the timing of the hunting season for both local and non-local hunters.

- In 2008, most of the herd did not come down to the latitude of Kotzebue until late October (although there was a smaller pulse in mid-September.) When the larger portion of the herd moved, they generally moved farther west to the coast by Kivalina, then came down the coast toward Kotzebue. At one point, there were an estimated 100,000 caribou near Kotzebue. The herd is now between Buckland and Nome on the Seward Peninsula.
- In 2008, the herd mixed with the Teshekpuk herd in the north of GMU 23.
- All of the big caribou herds have been declining, including elsewhere in Alaska and Canada.
- The ADF&G veterinarian described WACH caribou examined in 2007 to be in the best shape of any caribou in the state, with no evidence of starvation. Necropsies of caribou that died-off in 1994-95 and 1999-2000 indicated they had starved. The herd has been examined for contaminants to respond to local concerns about the potential effects of Project Chariot or mining. There has been no evidence of heavy metals, isotopes or other contaminants in the meat.
- Jim asked people to report to him on the condition of caribou they are seeing and harvesting, especially if they see carcasses in the spring.

The following points were raised during discussion of the caribou herd and harvest:

- Concern that the wolf population is very high and is impacting caribou. (Jim Dau noted that there has been only one wolf census in the region in 1991; ADF&G is thinking about conducting a wolf survey in spring 2009.)
- The caribou come through the area in different locations every year.

Discussion of Issues Related to Fall Hunting in Unit 23

The discussion among meeting participants in Shungnak emphasized the importance of local subsistence hunting to provide food for local families and communities. Conflicts that disrupt local hunting, reduce success, or require local hunters to travel further to be successful (especially with very high fuel prices) are of great concern. The group discussed the following topics.

Noise and Other Disturbance

- People have concerns about aircraft, jet boats and other boats creating noise that interferes with caribou movement and disturbs animals near local hunting areas.
- Specific concerns included jet boat use on the Hunt River (by bow hunter and photographer) that disturbed migrating caribou, and local scheduled air carriers flying too low along the river corridors sight-seeing and/or looking at game.
- It was suggested that aircraft fly on the south side of the Kobuk River and maintain a minimum elevation that will not disturb game.
- Plane visits are high at the mouth of the Pah River, where people come for fishing, as well as hunting access.

Disturbance of Migration

The following was suggested as ways to avoid disturbing or diverting the migration in a local area:

- Let the first group of caribou pass.
- Hunters should be dropped off and hunt on the south side of the Kobuk River.

Conflicts between Local and Non-Local Hunting

- One person suggested that the local hunting season start earlier than the non-local season. However, state hunting regulations can not set different seasons for hunters from different areas of Alaska; it would also be difficult to set early-season dates, since the migration timing varies each year.

Meat Care & Donations

- There is interest in donations of meat and possibly hides to local villages. (Phil Driver noted that he hires local people to process all of the meat harvested in his guiding business and the meat goes to people in Kivalina.)
- The Working Group could consider ways to make connections between guides, transporters and villages regarding donation of meat. It is important that meat be very well cared for.

Regulation of Guides and Transporters

- Agencies should contact villages/IRAs to request their comments on applications for guide camps or other uses that require a permit. Prior to each season, the agencies should tell the villages where there are permits for camps or other uses, and (if possible) approximately how many guides/transporters/clients they expect to be in the area during the season.

Other Suggestions

- The State of Alaska should lower the age for free hunting license (it is now 60 years of age.) Jim Dau noted that individuals who earn less than \$8,200/year are eligible to purchase a license for \$5.