

# **Proposal A: CUA & Caribou Bag Limit**

*This proposal would:*

- 1. Shift the effective dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area (in Unit 23) from Aug. 25-Sept. 15 to Sept. 9-Sept. 30.**
- 2. Increase the nonresident caribou bag limit in portions of Unit 23 from 1 to 2 caribou per year.**

*This is a public proposal.*

***Department Recommendation: No recommendation.***

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*Developments since the April 2008 meeting of the Unit 23 Working Group in Kotzebue:*

- 1. 2007 WAH population estimate finalized at 377,000 caribou (a decrease from 490,000 caribou in 2003)**
  
- 2. Additional meetings were held in Kiana and Noatak to discuss this proposal:**
  - A. Broad support for shifting dates of Noatak CUA**
  
  - B. Essentially no support for increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit anywhere in Unit 23**
    - concern is that it will increase waste of meat**

# Proposal A: CUA & Caribou Bag Limit

## *Considerations:*

1. Shifting dates of Noatak CUA to Sept. 9-Sept. 30 could increase conflicts:
  - if caribou begin their fall migration in early September, as they did in the 1990s, and the area attracts additional (visiting) hunters
  - if early September hunting focuses on the vanguard of caribou migration, especially considering the local sensitivity to disrupting caribou movements
  - if moose hunters, both nonresidents and general season residents, access the river corridor via airplane during Sept. 1-8
2. Increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit in portions of Unit 23 will not affect the population dynamics of the WAH at its present size
3. When the Unit 23 nonresident caribou bag limit was 5/year, >98% of nonresident hunters took  $\leq 2$  caribou/year

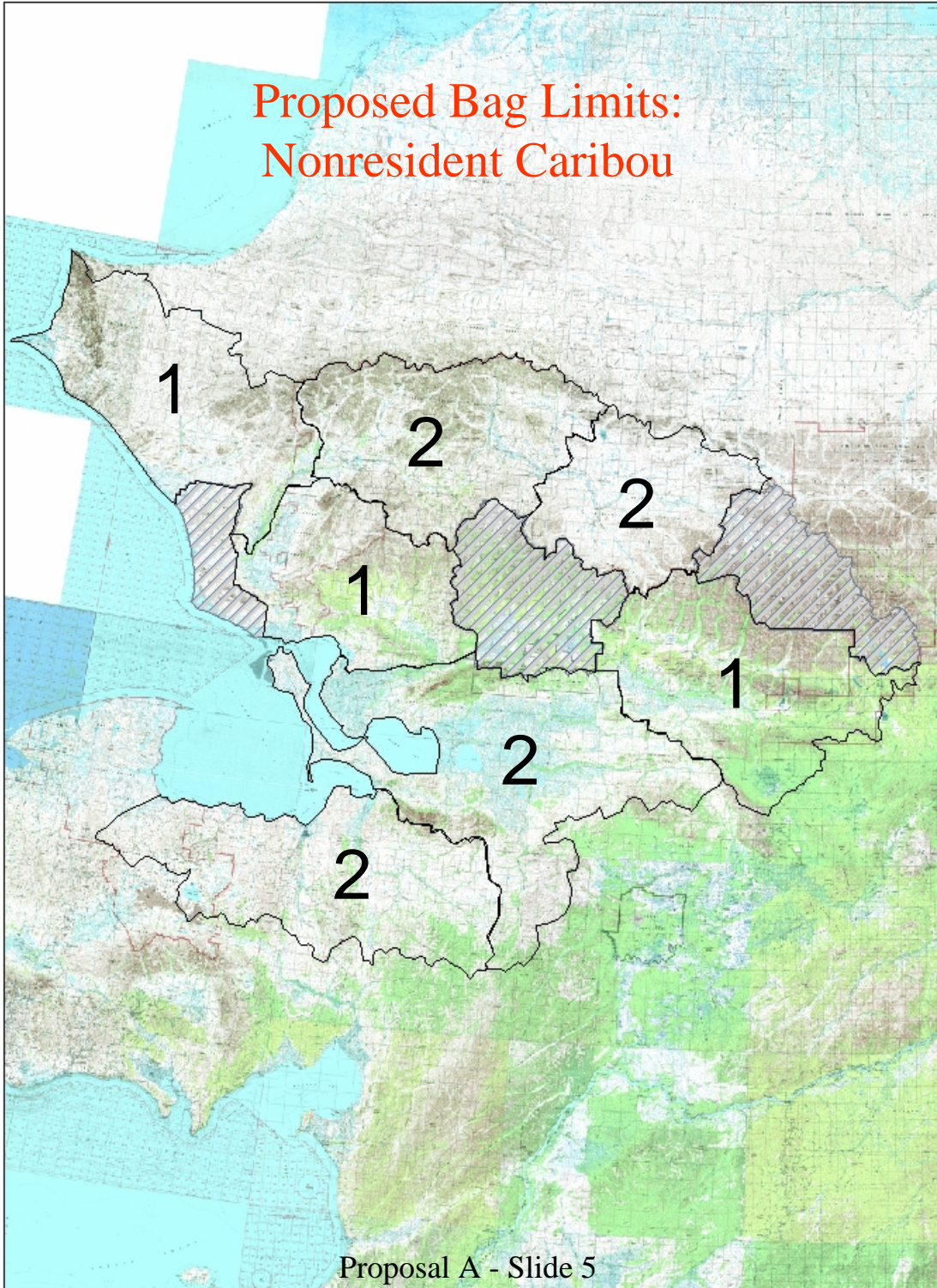
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## *Considerations (con't.):*

4. User conflicts appear to have declined in the last 2 years:
  - decreased reports of waste in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007
  - reduced nonres bag limit: 2 caribou per year in 2006
  - reduced nonres bag limit: 1 caribou per year in 2007
  - other factors include enhanced education, better enforcement, shorter period of hunting activity, availability of caribou
  
5. Increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit in remote portions of Unit 23 could increase conflicts if:
  - additional nonresident hunters are attracted to Unit 23
  - transporters replace nonresident hunters in G-O Areas 1, 4 and 6 with visiting resident hunters

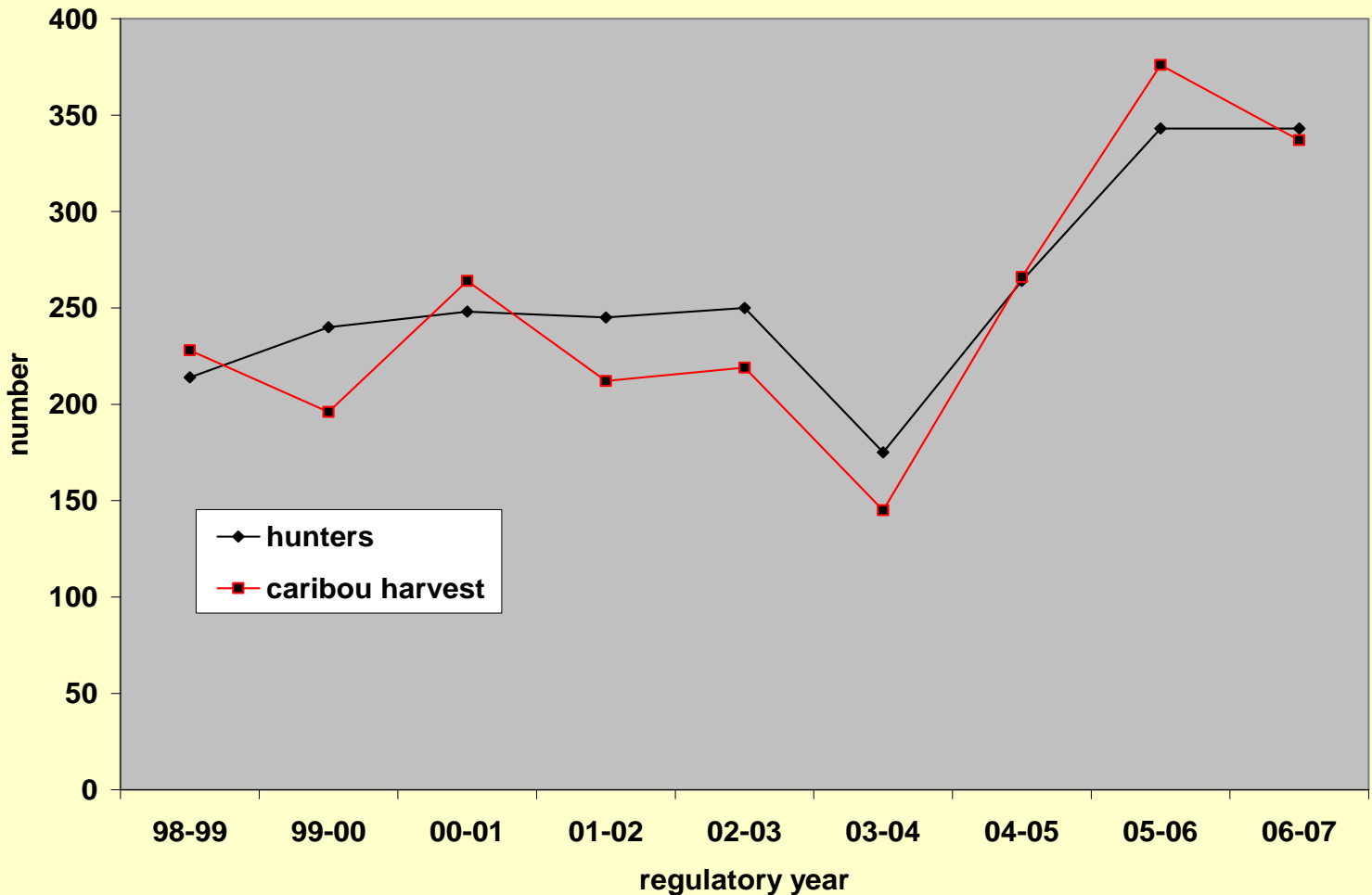
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Proposed Bag Limits:  
Nonresident Caribou



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## Yearly Number of Nonresident Caribou Hunters and Harvests, Unit 23, 1998 - 2006



**(Caribou harvest data incomplete for 2007-2008)**

## **PROPOSAL A**

**EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL:** This proposal would: 1) shift the effective dates of the Noatak Controlled Use Area from Aug. 25-Sept. 15 to Sept. 9-Sept. 30 and 2) increase the nonresident caribou bag limit in portions of Unit 23.

**DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:** **No recommendation.**

**RATIONALE:** The department has no recommendation for this proposal because neither component is a biological issue.

This proposal is the product of a Working Group that met in Kotzebue on April 23-24, 2008 to address conflicts among users in Unit 23 during the fall hunting season. Shifting the dates of the Noatak CUA is intended to align separation of boat vs. airplane hunters with the recent timing of caribou movements. Increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit in selected portions of Unit 23 is intended to attract nonresident hunters away from areas of local concern.

Several developments have occurred since the April 2008 meeting of the Unit 23 Working Group. The department issued a press release indicating the Western Arctic Caribou declined from 490,000 caribou in 2003 to 377,000 caribou in 2007. Also, additional meetings to discuss user conflicts were held in Kiana and Noatak following the Kotzebue meeting. At each meeting, there was broad support for shifting the dates of the Noatak CUA but essentially no support for increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit. People opposed increasing the nonresident bag limit out of concern that it would increase waste of meat to previous levels.

There are several considerations relevant to this proposal:

### ***Noatak Controlled Use Area***

1. During recent years, caribou movements have generally shifted later in the fall as stated in the proposal. In addition, the fall migration has also become more variable with regard to when it begins, movement patterns, and the prevalence of pulses or lulls in migratory movements. If the effective dates of the Noatak CUA are shifted as proposed and caribou begin migrating through the Noatak drainage in early September, as they did during the 1990s, conflicts are likely to be severe given local sensitivity to hunting the vanguard of the migration.
2. The Noatak CUA prohibits using airplanes to access hunting areas for all hunters, not just caribou hunters. Beginning the effective dates of the CUA on September 9 will provide 8 days of airplane access to nonresident and resident general season moose hunters. The Noatak River has many large gravel bars that facilitate airplane access, especially in the section immediately above and below the community of Noatak, and moose are present along the main river. Even if caribou are not present in the lower

Noatak drainage by early September, opening this area to moose hunters during September 1-8 without CUA restrictions could increase numbers of visiting hunters, airplane activity, and conflicts. The board needs to consider both moose and caribou hunting when determining the effective dates of the Noatak CUA.

*Nonresident caribou bag limit*

1. Although the WAH population has decreased since 2003, the herd was still unequivocally very large as of 2007. Even when the nonresident bag limit was 5 caribou per year, >98% of all nonresident hunters took no more than 2 caribou and the nonresident harvest was only 1-2% of the total harvest. At its current size, increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit will not affect the population dynamics of this herd, especially given that nonresident hunters rarely take females.

2. During the fall of 2006 and 2007, reports to department staff of waste by visiting hunters declined. The nonresident caribou bag limit was 2/yr in the fall of 2006, and 1/yr in 2007. Several other factors may have contributed to the reduction of waste besides the nonresident bag limit reduction. In 2006, state and federal enforcement staff focused their efforts on Unit 23, and in both years the department aggressively pursued a Unit 23 hunter education program through an internet web site, a brochure that was widely distributed, and posters that focused on reducing waste and conflicts.

3. Increasing the nonresident bag limit to 2 caribou per year in Guide Use Areas 2, 3, 5 and 7 may stimulate hunters to select areas away from areas of local concern, as proposed. However, if transporters simply replace nonresidents with resident hunters in Guide Use Areas 1, 4 and 6, the change in nonresident bag limit will not reduce the overall number of visiting hunters. Increasing the nonresident caribou bag limit could increase conflicts if the end result increases the total number of visiting hunters and associated airplane activity during the fall hunting season in Unit 23.

4. As a final consideration, the recently published 2008-2009 Alaska Hunting Regulations booklet lists the Unit 23 nonresident caribou bag limit as 1 caribou total (per regulatory year). Any changes in bag limit will need to be announced to the public.

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# STATE OF ALASKA

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### BOARDS SUPPORT SECTION

To: Cliff Judkins, Chairman  
Board of Game

From: Kristy Tibbles, Executive Director  
Board of Game

Date: June 27, 2008

Re: Advisory Committee Comments for Proposal A

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The intent of this memo is to provide information regarding the advisory committee comment process concerning the proposed regulatory changes to the Unit 23 nonresident bag limit for caribou and the dates for the use of aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak Controlled Use Area.

Once the Board approved the agenda change request to include the Unit 23 topic on the July 2, 2008 meeting agenda, correspondence from the Boards Support Section was sent to all advisory committee members in Unit 23 with information on Proposal A including the map and comment deadline. The Unit 23 advisory committees include: Upper Kobuk, Lower Kobuk, Kotzebue Sound, Noatak/Kivalina, and the Northern Seward Peninsula. Representatives of these committees were involved with the Unit 23 working group.

In addition to the correspondence, the chairmen of the committees were personally called by the Boards Support Section staff. Of the five advisory committees in Unit 23, four chairmen were successfully contacted; the Upper Kobuk Advisory Committee chairman could not be reached. Those chairmen who were contacted indicated that either an advisory committee teleconference was not needed or that it would be difficult to arrange an advisory committee teleconference because committee members were not available this time of the year.

The advisory committee chairmen verbally provided the following comments on Proposal A:

1. Pete Schaeffer, Chairman, Kotzebue Sound AC – Supports
2. Raymond Stoney, Chairman, Lower Kobuk AC – Supports the proposal and understands that there is some concern about the proposed bag limit change.
3. Enoch Mitchell, Chairman, Noatak/Kivalina AC – Supports
4. Ron Moto Sr., Chairman, Northern Seward Peninsula AC – Supports