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Draft prepared at the request of Chair Spraker

February 20, 2014

Findings of the Alaska Board of Game

Regarding Customary and Traditional Uses of the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd

2014-NNN-BOG

At its January 2014 meeting in Kotzebue, the Alaska Board of Game (board) took up Proposal 23, sponsored by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, to determine whether the Teshekpuk caribou herd (TCH) in game management units (GMUs) 22, 23, 24, 26A, and 26B were customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence under AS 16.05.258(a) and 5 AAC 99.010(b).

The board was first presented a customary and traditional use worksheet for consideration of the TCH in 1990. From the administrative record, it is not clear whether a customary and traditional use determination was made by the board at that time.

In 1992, when the board completed a review of subsistence regulations after passage of the 1992 subsistence statute, the board did not consider the TCH. However, the board did review the Western Arctic caribou herd (WAH) and established an amount reasonably necessary of 8,000–12,000 caribou. The WAH proposal prepared by the department included some caribou harvest information from Wainwright and Barrow, which now are known to be among the primary users of the TCH. Harvest information from other North Slope communities that are primary users of the TCH were not included (e.g., Atkasuk, Nuiqsut, Anaktuvuk Pass). The administrative record remains unclear if the 1992 board specifically included the TCH in the amount reasonably necessary (ANS) for subsistence of the WAH.

To ensure compliance with the requirements of AS 16.05.258, in January 2014 the department presented the board with a customary and traditional use worksheet for the TCH, in the form of a written report and an oral report, at its meeting in Kotzebue. Board deliberations on the findings of customary and traditional uses lead to a positive determination for the TCH, and that there was a harvestable surplus of the caribou population.

Caribou are present on the North Slope year-round. Four caribou herds intermingle at various times of the year: the WAH, the Central Arctic caribou herd (CAH), the TCH, and the Porcupine caribou herd (PCH). Although the TCH has demonstrated high fidelity to calving areas surrounding Teshekpuk Lake, extensive use of coastal habitat for insect relief, and broad use of the coastal plain west of the Colville River drainage in late summer, its use of winter ranges is highly variable and the overlap between the TCH with WAH and CAH animals can be extensive during fall and summer.

Following the board's findings, the department then presented options for ANS to the board. The options were included in both a written report and an oral report. One of the options was to forego establishment of a separate ANS for the TCH because caribou harvest data from some communities considered the primary users of the Teshekpuk caribou herd (Barrow, Wainwright) were included in the information reviewed by the board in 1992 when the ANS for the Western Arctic caribou herd (WAH) was determined to be 8,000–12,000 caribou. The 2014 department reports stated: "While the administrative record of that meeting is limited at best, it may be that the [1992] board set the WAH ANS with TCH animals in mind, in effect, creating a combined ANS for the two herds."

After deliberation, the board determined that the ANS for the TCH was already included in the 8,000–12,000 caribou it had determined for the WAH, given the 1992 board's consideration of some North Slope community harvests in establishing the WAH ANS.

At its February 2014 meeting in Fairbanks, during deliberations on Proposal 50, the board re-affirmed the positive finding for Teshekpuk caribou, and re-affirmed that the ANS for Teshekpuk caribou was considered to be part of the ANS for the Western Arctic herd. The board also communicated its intent that the positive finding for Teshekpuk caribou carried into ADF&G Region III units.

Nothing in this finding prevents the board from changing either herd's amount reasonably necessary for subsistence as necessary for conservation and management of the resource.