

1 Submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game
2 December 28, 2016

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4 Background information for Proposal 1: ANS for Teshekpuk caribou. Transcript of 1992 Board
5 of Game deliberations on Proposal 136B

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7 [Transcribed from audiotapes of Board of Game deliberations on Proposal 136B, Setting an ANS for the
8 Western Arctic Caribou Herd, November 13, 1992. Counter 189; digital file hour: 1:13:13 through
9 1:38:19, approx. 25 minutes. Transcribed by Jim Simon, ADF&G Division of Subsistence, December 27,
10 2016. Note: quality of recording is difficult to distinguish individual voices in some cases.]

11 Burley: It's been moved and seconded to adopt Proposal 136B. Mr. Regelin?

12 Regelin: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I direct your attention to Worksheet 36B, which will provide you
13 information on the Western Arctic herd and its historical harvest levels and the amounts that are needed
14 for subsistence. This is the largest herd in Alaska. Currently numbers over 400,000 animals and it is
15 continuing to grow and expand into new areas. It is used by numerous villages throughout Northwest and
16 Western Alaska. It's so large that hunting has a negligible effect. We have a current season of that does
17 not close in most of the unit. It runs from July 1 to June 30. It has a daily bag limit of 5 caribou, so you
18 can take 5 caribou a day. What we have done over time, as the herd continues to grow, is liberalize the
19 season more and more just so that people have no restrictions on their opportunity to harvest this herd.
20 We allow nonresidents to harvest caribou in this area too, but I don't believe their seasons are the same.
21 But they are limited to a total of 5 caribou. Most of the people that fly into the area take one, and a few of
22 them take 2 caribou. It's the local residents that would take more. I think that based on figures of harvest
23 over this time that the amount needed for subsistence varies between 8,000 to 12,000. That's based on our
24 harvests estimates from the Department of Wildlife Conservation and figures from the Division of
25 Subsistence from community surveys. We feel that the current season and bag limits certainly provide a
26 reasonable opportunity to harvest caribou. We recommend you readopt the current seasons and bag limits
27 in these areas.

28 Burley: AI?

29 Franzmann: Based on the recommendations of the department of 8,000 to 12,000 range, I think is what
30 we should stay with. This is a difficult one for them to get accurate harvest data. This is our best estimate
31 of what has gone on in agreement with both Wildlife Conservation and Subsistence, so I see no reason to
32 deviate from those numbers presented.

33 Burley: Skip. I'm sorry, Rose?

34 Maher: This 8,000 to 12,000, is that based on a combination of harvest tickets and information from
35 Subsistence, or is that strictly harvest ticket information?

36 Regelin: Mr. Chairman, it's based on both, and we're relying more on the Subsistence Division's
37 estimates at this time than harvest ticket information. The biologists in the Division of Wildlife feel that
38 this is a good range too.

39 Burley: Mr. Waller?

40 Wallen: Mr. Chairman, I would have a question for Terry. How many people live in the area? What's the
41 human population that is taking the caribou, the population in the area the herd occupies?

42 Haynes: Mr. Chairman, I'll ask Elizabeth Andrews to provide some population information that she may
43 have at the table.

44 Wallen: Actually, I would kind of like to see an overhead showing their range and how it's expanding, if
45 you have something like that?

46 Regelin: I'd like to have John Coady come up and maybe kind of point out, to the best of his ability, the
47 range right now. If the Western Arctic herd is doing like the rest of the caribou this winter, I'm not sure
48 he knows.

49 Burley?: John, there's one at the end of the table that you might be able to use. Right there by the blue
50 notebook.

51 Coady: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Actually, the range of the Western Arctic herd has expanded somewhat
52 in recent years. This overhead does not cover the current range. I think, frankly, the more we learn about
53 caribou in this state, and specifically about the Western Arctic herd, we'll probably be revising our
54 estimates about their actual range. That is with more – with greater use of radio-collars and telemetry
55 studies, both conventional radio-collars and those that use satellites to provide location information, I
56 think we're finding that the range of the Western Arctic herd, or at least some animals, is probably, you
57 know, larger than we've previously thought. But, basically, in a general way, the majority of the herd
58 occupies virtually all of GMU 26A, Units 23, and then we go off the map. The herd extends down the
59 western side of the state. It's in the vicinity of Galena. At this time, it extends down through the Nulato
60 Hills and large numbers of animals this year are as far south as Unalakleet, which has not happened for 5
61 or 6 years that they've extended that far. As the herd increases in size, and as Wayne mentioned early, the
62 herd now numbers something in excess of 400,000 animals and it may be considerably larger than that,
63 the range of the herd continues to expand also, and we're seeing this expansion now, particularly in the
64 lower Yukon and Koyukuk areas in the vicinity of Galena in GMU 21 and we're seeing it in GMU 22,
65 with the herd expanding somewhat onto the Seward Peninsula, and south through the Nulato Hills in
66 eastern Norton Sound. If Elizabeth is trying to figure out the human population of this area, I don't have
67 this information. But I can say that the herd in recent years has been easily accessible to residents of about
68 30 to 35 villages.

69 Burley: Thank you Mr. Coady. When you talk about going all the way down south to Unalakleet, is that
70 all from radio-collared caribou?

71 Coady: Radio-collars do provide a lot of information and one of the things they do is to give us a clue of –
72 as to where to begin looking visually for caribou. And that first clue can come through our satellite
73 information, where we simply can sit down at a computer in the office and find out where the few animals
74 that we have satellite radio-collars on are located. Then, though radio-tracking flights to locate the
75 animals that are collared with conventional radios, we have found, in fact, that about three-quarters of all
76 our radio collars at this time are in the Nulato Hills, essentially in eastern Norton Sound. We have about,

77 to the best of our estimate, we have about 140 active radio-collars on the herd, and something
78 approaching about 100 of those radio-collars are in the Ungalik, Shaktoolik, and Unalakleet rivers.

79 Burley: Dr. Andrews?

80 Andrews: Thank you Mr. Chairman. For the North Slope communities, which include those in 26A, as
81 well as Anaktuvuk and Point Hope, it's roughly 6,000 people, based on the 1990 census. In Unit 23, all
82 the communities are not shown for Unit 23 on this particular map, but population for Unit 23
83 communities is roughly 4,500 people, and then, as Dr. Coady mentioned, there are a number of other
84 communities outside of these game management units that have access to the herd.

85 Burley: Board members, any other questions? Roger?

86 Huntington: Just for your information purposes, I talked to my dad last night and I guess there's up to
87 40,000 of them behind Galena, Arctic caribou herd, and I just kind of concerned about the small Galena
88 herd back there. I just wanted to share an observation to the board and to staff that I'm kind of concerned
89 about when the time comes for when the population of the Western caribou herd might go down, back
90 when it was allowable to take other animals, especially in Unit 23, we've done a lot of flying up there,
91 and we're witnessing a lot of unusual kind of practices in trapping and taking predators and other fur
92 bearing animals using the caribou as bait, and I'm just kind of concerned about it. I know the 5 per day is
93 sustainable right now, but I'm just concerned that this quantity of animals and taking this quantity of
94 animals daily, which does happen, leads to a practice that is – I never could have dreamed that it would
95 exist, and it's hard to swallow when you fly up there. Anyway, having said that, that's all I wanted to say.

96 Burley: Mr. Regelin, is there a concern by the department that this herd is on the verge of crashing.

97 Coady?: Mr. Chairman. At this time, we have no indications that that is happening. This map, it's going
98 to fluctuate. At some point it's going to go down. We don't know how much higher it might go. And we
99 are not seeing any evidence that it's starting to decline.

100 Burley: Do you know what the peak of that herd has been historically?

101 Coady?: Mr. Chairman, I guess we certainly don't have precise information on that, but from what can be
102 gleaned in the historical literature, one might speculate that historically in northern, in northwestern
103 Alaska, and western Alaska, that caribou herds, that *Rangifer* herds, at one point in time, caribou, in the
104 mid-1800s, may have numbered something in the range of 600,000 animals. Historically, the best
105 estimates from the reindeer industry in the early and mid-1930s, at a time when caribou numbers were
106 very very low, reindeer numbers were very very high, and also that reindeer may have numbered 600,000
107 animals before they declined. I think it's probably pretty dangerous to speculate that therefore 600,000 is
108 the number at which we might see caribou herds begin to decline. But Wayne is certainly correct in that
109 eventually the herd is going to decline. At this time, we're not seeing any evidence of that. We've just
110 completed fall composition surveys and found over 50 calves per 100 cows in the Western Arctic herd,
111 which to us says that the herd is still continuing to grow at a fairly substantial rate. But, in the foreseeable
112 future, and perhaps during all our tenure, the board member's tenure and many of ours on the staff, we
113 believe we are going to see a change in the trajectory of that herd. And that the rate of growth is going to
114 decline. And perhaps the growth rate of the herd is going to go down. And at that time, as Mr. Huntington

115 has pointed out, we are concerned about that point, and we are trying to work very closely with residents
116 of the area so that they're aware that these good times we're enjoying now are not going to last forever
117 and that there will come a time when more restrictive regulations will be necessary.

118 Burley: Skip?

119 Wallen: Mr. Chairman, in asking the question about human population, I was just trying to relate that
120 8,000 to 12,000 figure to something. If we took the midpoint of 10,000 animals and then with the human
121 population in the range that the caribou are occupying at this time, it works out to about 1 caribou per
122 person.

123 Burley: Roger?

124 Huntington: Another thing I'd like to point out is that when the herd comes into the Galena area, they
125 bring different wolf packs in. It takes some time after the caribou leave for the wolves to leave too. We'll
126 get some good wolves in that period, different quality of wolves definitely, and I just wanted to mention
127 that. When the wolves do come in they seem to acquire a taste for moose, and get more moose than
128 caribou, in appearance anyway, when I fly around and see that they do impact the area.

129 Burley: Board members do we have a number for the range? Everybody's happy with 8,000 to 12,000?
130 Any objection to using 8,000 to 12,000 as the number that provides reasonable opportunity for
131 subsistence needs? Okay, that will be the consensus then of the board. Board members are you ready for
132 the question? Question's been called for on Proposal 136B. Is there any objection to adopting Proposal
133 136B incorporating the findings and recommendations of the department and the range that the board has
134 agreed upon they feel provides reasonable opportunity for subsistence needs? Hearing no objection, that
135 will be the action of this board. Yes, Roger. Roger is requesting a timeout, so we'll step down.

136 Burley: We're back in session. Let the record show that all board members are here with the exception of
137 Ken John. Last night, I had indicated that we were going to go through, try to go through caribou and stop
138 the C&T findings. However, after reviewing the last caribou proposal, it's one that we would have to find
139 a C&T finding on and apply the 8 criteria. I think what we're going to do is stop and we'll take that one
140 up, the very first one, when we meet in January, and apply the 8 criteria to that, and once we get into the
141 mode of applying the 8 criteria, we'll go through and work on all the other proposals that need the board-
142 defined C&T use on. And then we'll go back and pick up those that we've pretty much been accepting the
143 action of previous boards. So, at this point, I would say that we're through with our C&T findings, and at
144 this time I would like to have the board members review the notes on the Anchorage-Matsu-Kenai
145 Nonsubsistence Area. Let's review that and discuss it, and then maybe Bev will have a clean copy that
146 she can make notes on and then we'll be ready for the teleconference...

147 [end 1:38:19]

148 [Note: Alaska Board of Game Members on November 13, 1992*:
149 Dick Burley
150 Rosemarie Maher
151 Richard "Skip" Wallen
152 Ken Johns (not present for these deliberations)]

153 Don Hanks
154 Albert Franzman
155 Roger Huntington
156 Jack Didrickson
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158 *Source of information: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.past_members, accessed
159 December 28, 2016.]