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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: August 3, 2018

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Nelchina Caribou Hunts Include Changes to Bag Limit, Quota, Reporting Requirements

(Glennallen) – Caribou hunters in Game Management Unit 13 will be limited to harvesting bulls only this hunting season – and fewer animals than in recent years. In an effort to maintain a Nelchina caribou herd population objective of 35,000 – 40,000, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game issued an emergency order limiting harvest to bulls only for all Unit 13 state-managed caribou hunts (RC561, RC562, CC001, and DC485). In addition, the harvest quota has been adjusted to 1,400.

The department's July 2018 post-calving survey estimated the Nelchina herd at approximately 35,700 caribou, near the lower end of the population objective. Caribou population objectives are based on the number of animals a given range can sustainably support. Too many caribou can over-graze a herd's range leading to malnutrition or starvation. Sometimes caribou will leave over-grazed range or join up with adjacent herds for areas of better forage. Currently, biologists have no indication that the Nelchina herd's range has been over-grazed.

"The majority of the herd wintered in Canada or by the border, mixing with other herds," said Glennallen Wildlife Biologist Heidi Hatcher. "We have evidence that some of our animals left the wintering grounds with the Fortymile herd, rather than coming back to the Nelchina Basin."

Information collected from collared caribou indicate severe winter conditions in the eastern part of Nelchina herd's range led to greater than expected winter mortality. July aerial surveys also revealed fewer than average calves in the Nelchina Basin. Although calf-to-cow ratios remain healthy, these factors cumulatively contributed to this summer's lower population estimate.

"Basically, this means hunters have done their job," said Regional Management Coordinator Todd Rinaldi. "We started last summer at around 50,000 caribou, which was well above our population objective, so we encouraged hunters to take cows and set our harvest bar high. Combined with over-winter mortality and lower than anticipated productivity, we've arrived within the population objective."

Biologists believe a harvest quota of 1,400 bull caribou from the state season with additional federal harvest can be taken sustainably while providing for subsistence opportunity and modest herd growth. Harvest quotas are established annually based on summer population surveys, composition surveys, measures of productivity, and historic harvest information. Harvest allocations for the registration and draw permit hunts will be:

- RC561 – 500 bulls
- RC562 – 500 bulls
- DC485 – 250 bulls
- CC001 – This hunt will also be bulls only, but is managed under a separate cap.

In addition to the bulls-only restriction and harvest quota, a three-day harvest reporting requirement will apply to all state-managed Unit 13 caribou hunts. Successful hunters can provide wildlife managers the information they need to closely track in-season harvest by filing hunt reports online at https://secure.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=interperm.enter_report_hunterid, by phone at (907) 822-3461, or in person at the Glennallen or Palmer Fish and Game offices. Hunts may be closed by emergency order to ensure the harvest quota is not exceeded.

For hunt updates and additional information call the Nelchina Hotline at 907-267-2304, or contact Todd Rinaldi at todd.rinaldi@alaska.gov or (907) 861-2105.

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