

**Findings of the Alaska Board of Game
2011-184-BOG**

**Game Management Unit 13
Caribou and Moose Subsistence Uses**

These findings supplement 2006-170-BOG as to uses of Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose. In the 2006 finding, the Board indentified the specific pattern of subsistence uses upon which the positive customary and traditional use finding for Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose, set forth in 5 AAC 99.025, were based. This pattern of uses originated within the communities of the indigenous Ahtna Athabascan inhabitants of the Copper River Basin. Among other things, the findings emphasized the “community-based” nature of this traditional pattern of use. As described in those findings, this community-based subsistence pattern:

- Links families in widespread networks of sharing that are shaped by traditional norms of behavior;
- Provides a context in which skills, knowledge, and values are passed across generations; is accomplished efficiently with thorough, non-wasteful use of the harvested game and often by hunters who specialize in harvesting meat for the community; and
- Occurs within a broader pattern of use of and dependence upon a variety of locally-harvested wild foods that is a key element of the way of life of the local area.

The board has also noted that this community-based pattern as established by the Ahtna has been adopted and modified by other local settlers and, to a more limited degree, by other Alaska residents. This community-based, local use pattern was contrasted to a largely nonlocal, Rail belt based pattern that was probably most properly characterized as a non-subsistence use pattern. Thus, the 2006 findings addressed and discussed two basic use patterns for Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose.

The Board finds that there is need to recognize the range of uses within the previously-described subsistence use pattern that have developed as individuals, families, and other social groups, both within and outside the local area, have adapted to changing economic, demographic, and cultural conditions. Differences have developed concerning the level of organization of subsistence uses of Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose, such that the traditional uses are practiced among households and families in addition to the community-based pattern established by the Ahtna. The Ahtna community-based pattern persists within close-knit communities that are also widespread both within and outside the basin. Other basin residents and some nonlocal residents who are not part of the traditional Ahtna community engage in subsistence uses at a more individual, household, or extended family level. Both sub-patterns exhibit, with some variation, most of the criteria listed in 5 AAC 99.010(b), but different regulatory options may be necessary to provide reasonable opportunities for each. The range of uses that characterize these sub-patterns are as follows.

Since the beginning of the towns and settlement areas within the range, or with easy access to, the Nelchina Caribou Herd and Unit 13 moose, individuals, households, and families from

those towns and settlements have hunted the herd to provide for their basic necessities of life, especially food, and not just for recreational or trophy purposes. This relatively small use is not community based in nature, in that these individuals, households, and families are not linked to extensive networks of cooperation and sharing or are not part of larger social groups that organize and promote traditional knowledge and behavior, but is focused primarily on procuring food and has, as of the date of these findings, existed now for at least three generations in some of these areas. As set forth in greater detail below, this use has at least a few identifiable characteristics which separate it from the larger Rail belt based, non-subsistence use patterns.

Since at least the early 1930's, hunting of the Nelchina Caribou Herd and Unit 13 moose have been regulated by season and bag limits. Nonlocal hunters interviewed in the 1980's by the Subsistence Division of ADF&G confirmed that most hunt in the fall, with fewer participating in winter hunts. All hunters currently tend to focus their harvest efforts during the late summer and early fall, when caribou and moose are in their best physical condition and relatively accessible from the road system. Winter hunts have been an important back-up opportunity for the community based subsistence use pattern described in the 2006 findings, and may also be relied on by other subsistence users, to a somewhat lesser extent. The winter hunts do not appear to be important to non-subsistence users.

Regarding efficiency of hunting effort, the Board has not been presented with any information that would distinguish non-local subsistence users from other users based primarily from the Rail belt. Compared to community-based and other local users who hunt close to home, non-local users tend to travel greater distances (typically 200-300 miles), thereby incurring greater costs, to harvest Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose, making their use less efficient. However, data from the 1980's illustrates that even non-local subsistence users tend to hunt in the areas most accessible to their communities. Thus, Fairbanks-area hunters tended to hunt near the Denali Highway, and Anchorage-area hunters tended to hunt near the Glenn Highway. Also, efficiency by non-community based subsistence users may be fostered to some extent by limiting hunting to a few well-known areas year after year, within relatively easy, and predictably economical, reach of participants.

Non-local subsistence users of the Nelchina Caribou Herd and Unit 13 moose and others who are not organized at the community-level have testified, and Board members know from experience, that they prefer to return year-by-year to one or more well-known and long-established camping/hunting sites. These are traditional "caribou," "moose," or "caribou and moose" camps for these individuals and their families. If caribou or moose are not obtained during these forays, chances are they will not be obtained at all because subsistence users, unlike non-subsistence users, tend not to travel around the state to experience a wide variety of hunting opportunities. Unlike subsistence users who are organized at the community level, many other users tend to travel further into the backcountry, away from major roads and rivers, often using off-road vehicles to get to the remotest locations possible.

The Board has not been presented with any information that would distinguish the handling, preparing, preserving, and storing techniques used by individuals, households, families outside the traditional community-based context to distinguish them from their neighbors who hunt for recreation. Most users of Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose based along the Rail belt

freeze their harvested meat and use modern methods of handling, preparing, preservation, and storage. Compared to those who follow traditions established by the Ahtna and adopted by some other users, there is less use of organ meats, and almost no use of the hide and bones; and the roles in handling and preparing harvested animals are less formal and not based on longstanding, widely-understood rules of proper behavior towards the animals taken, as is the case for those who follow the Ahtna, community-based traditions.

Because households and families engaged in subsistence uses tend to hunt from long-established, multi-generational camps, lore about how and where to hunt is handed down from generation to generation. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge is less formalized than the way knowledge is passed on within the Ahtna community based use pattern, but it is more apparent and traditional than is the case for non-subsistence uses, in which knowledge is clearly passed from one generation to the next but very little in the way of a formal and traditional transmission system exists, and knowledge is not necessarily tied to any particular location.

All subsistence users tend to share their harvests within their families and with close friends and, to some extent, this sharing is expected from year to year, and plays parts in traditional meals and celebrations. Non-local hunters interviewed by the Division of Subsistence in the 1980's confirmed that they shared mostly within their own households, while approximately 1/3 also said they shared with friends. Sharing among nonlocal hunters, as well as among some hunters who live in the local area, is less formal than is true under the community based use pattern as practiced by the Ahtna and some other local residents, and community and peer pressure to share is far less pronounced, but it is greater than is generally the case for the non-subsistence uses of Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose. Some long-established families living in close proximity to, and with a well-established history of hunting the Nelchina Caribou Herd and Unit 13 moose, do expect that, if a family member successfully harvests a Nelchina caribou, the meat will be shared.

Some nonlocal hunters have testified that, as is generally the case in a subsistence use pattern, they prefer to consume wild foods over purchased foods, and often obtain the majority of their protein needs from Alaska's fish and game resources, as well as pick berries and harvest other wild foods. These preferences are sometimes expressed by non-subsistence hunters as well. Such users often travel to different, favored locations to harvest fish and game and other wild foods, but many of these locations are outside of the range of the Nelchina Caribou Herd and/or Unit 13 moose. Most non-local residents interviewed by the Division of Subsistence in the 1980's reported that moose was more important than caribou in their harvesting priorities, and often travelled to other locations to obtain moose. Locally-based users, on the other hand, tend to concentrate all of their wild food harvests in close proximity to the herd's range, and often try to harvest more than one resource per trip. Non-subsistence users tend to rely on wild foods to a much lesser degree, or not at all, compared to both groups of subsistence users.

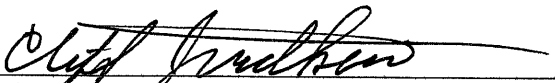
Based on public testimony provided during the Board's last several meetings addressing the Nelchina Caribou Herd, on the Board's own experience, and on the above finding and 2006-170-BOG, the Board, applying its expertise and judgment, concludes that, at most, a few thousand people use the Nelchina Caribou Herd and Unit 13 moose in accordance with the identified subsistence use patterns, and that, therefore, a range of 600-1000 caribou and 300-600

moose are necessary to provide a reasonable opportunity for both identified subsistence uses of this herd. This finding may be updated as appropriate and as additional data on the uses is gathered.

Vote: 6-1

March 7, 2011

Wasilla, Alaska


Cliff Judkins, Chairman
Alaska Board of Game