Summary of Wildlife Management in GMU 23

Charlotte Westing, Area Wildlife Biologist
7,700 people reside in Unit 23

- Kotzebue-region hub
- 11 outlying villages located on Chukchi Sea coast or along major rivers
- Villages are organized into 5 Advisory Committees
User Conflicts

Many people come from within and outside the state for backpacking, floating, wildlife viewing, and hunting.
Discretionary Permit Authority

92.052 (1) Permit issuance

• Require permits to be acquired within Unit 23
  - Sheep RS388 and RS389 (also available in 26A)
  - Brown Bear RB700
  - Muskoxen RX106
  - Moose RM880 - Also requires permits to be issued in advance of the season (June 1 - July 15)
Discretionary Permit Authority

92.052 (5) Trophy Nullification in Subsistence Hunts

• Muskoxen (TX107, RX106)
• Brown Bear (RB700)
Moose

**Population Surveys**

- Population Estimates
- Composition Data

**IM Objectives**

- 3,500-9,200 (population)
- 210-920 (harvest)

**Subsistence**

- Positive C&T finding
- 325-400 (ANS)
Moose Densities in Unit 23

- Lower Noatak-Wulik-CKNM: 0.29 Adults/sq. mile
- Upper Noatak: 0.03 Adults/sq. mile
- Lower Kobuk: 0.59 Adults/sq. mile
- Upper Kobuk: 0.16 Adults/sq. mile
- Selawik: 0.28 Adults/sq. mile
- Northern Seward Peninsula: 0.16 Adults/sq. mile
Moose

Spring Calf Recruitment

Lower Noatak-Wulik-CKNM
15 Calves/100 Adults

Upper Noatak
12 Calves/100 Adults

Lower Kobuk
15 Calves/100 Adults

Upper Kobuk
15 Calves/100 Adults

Selawik
11 Calves/100 Adults

Northern Seward Peninsula
8 Calves/100 Adults

Unit 23: Slide 8
Moose

- Population
- Harvest
  - Current Regulations
    - General Moose Hunt
    - RM880
    - DM871-877 (Nonresidents)

- There are three moose proposals
Unit 23: Moose

Hunter Participation and Harvest Information

*Harvest ticket data only
Moose
Hunter Effort by Residency

*Harvest ticket data only
Moose
Harvest by Drainage

*Harvest ticket data only
Muskoxen

🌿 Cape Thompson Population
- Population Estimate
- Composition Data

🌿 Harvest
- TX107

🌿 Proposal 23 regarding trophy nullification could apply to this area
Cape Thompson Muskoxen

2011 Cape Thompson Muskoxen Survey Area

- Traditional survey area
- Survey area by GMU
  - 23Z
  - 26A
- Transects flown

Unit 23: Slide 14
Cape Thompson Muskoxen

1970 - 36 animals
1988 - 106 animals
# Cape Thompson Muskoxen

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Muskoxen

Seward Peninsula Population
- Addressed in Unit 22 overview

Harvest
- RX106
- DX106 (no permits)

Proposal 23 regarding trophy nullification would apply to this area
Sheep

✿ **Population**
  - Population Estimates

✿ **Harvest**
  - De Long Mountains
  - Baird Mountains
  - Schwatka Mountains

✿ There are no sheep proposals
Brown Bear

Population Estimate

Harvest

• Current Regulations
  - General Season
  - RB700 (Subsistence Hunt)
  - DB761-767
  - DB771-777

• Annual harvest

There are two proposals addressing brown bear management in Unit 23
Brown Bear Population

Population Information

- 1987 study with Sightability Correction Factor (SCF)
  - Densities of 1 bear/25.7 mi²
- 2008 study with NPS- final results pending, no SCF
  - Preliminary minimum count 1.9-2.2 bears/25.7 mi²
- Anecdotal reports, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and incidental observations suggest an increasing trend.
Brown Bear
Annual Harvest

*Harvest ticket data only
Brown Bear
Harvest by Residency

*Harvest ticket data only
Wolves

ʶ Population
ʶ Harvest

There are two wolf proposals

*Sealing data only
Furbearer

- Arctic Fox
- Red Fox
- Wolverine *
- Beaver
- Lynx *
- Squirrels
- Marmots
- Mink
- Marten
- Weasel
- Muskrat
- River Otter *

There are two furbearer proposals
Reported Furbearer Harvest

*Sealing data only

Unit 23: Slide 27
Other Species in Unit 23

★ Hares
★ Grouse
★ Ptarmigan
★ Black Bear

- No harvest ticket or reporting requirement
- No sealing requirement
- 3 bears per year
- No closed season, open to residents or nonresidents
Unit 23 User Conflict Planning Process

Background: Conflicts among nonlocal hunters, commercial operators and local residents have been a management problem in Unit 23 for over 25 years

• I will provide a timeline of these conflicts and then summarize an on-going planning process the department initiated in 2008 to try to reduce them

Timeline:

1984 Noatak village requested F&G to restrict use of airplanes for hunting in the Noatak drainage – 1st documentation of user conflicts in Unit 23

• The village submitted proposals to achieve this to the BOG annually until, in 1988, the original Noatak CUA was established: this was the 1st regulatory action taken to reduce conflicts in Unit 23

• The original Noatak CUA was small and largely ineffective
1993 First working group formed to address user conflicts

- Participants:
  - Kotzebue Sound AC
  - Noatak-Kivalina AC
  - Staff from ADF&G, NPS, FWS

- This group submitted a proposal to modify the size of the Noatak CUA

- An amended version of the proposal was passed: Noatak CUA was roughly doubled in size while the effective period was reduced by 50%
1998 Although this CUA quickly reduced conflicts in the Noatak drainage, conflicts continued to occur elsewhere in Unit 23

• Three groups of visiting hunters in the upper Kobuk drainage were held at gunpoint by 5 residents of Shungnak & Kobuk

1998-2000 Legislature funded a planning process that included guides, transporters, FAI & ANC Advisory Committee reps as well as agency staff and local users – 1st formal planning process to address user conflicts in Unit 23

• This group identified the Squirrel River drainage and the upper Kobuk River drainage as the highest priority areas to address user conflicts

• Although 2 proposals to establish new CUAs were submitted to the BOG, no regulatory changes resulted from this planning effort
Unit 23 User Conflicts

2005 BOG met in Kotzebue
- 2-hr evening work session devoted to user conflicts – a product of this meeting was development of online and printed orientation materials for visiting hunters

2007 Region V borrowed a planner (C. Jacobson) from Region II to conduct an ‘issue assessment’ to decide how to address conflicts
- She interviewed ~80 individuals across the spectrum of users and organizations
- Jacobson assembled an ad hoc group in Kotzebue that decided to begin a 3rd planning effort to reduce conflicts in 2008
- R. Somerville & R. Joule secured legislative CIP funding that was matched by BLM and FWS (NPS funded transportation costs)
- The remainder of my presentation will summarize this planning process
Unit 23 User Conflicts

2008 ADF&G contracted a facilitator (J. Caulfield) to oversee this planning process: we needed professional help and we wanted to be clear that this was a multi-agency/user-based process

21 Working Group Members:
- Representative from each of 5 Unit 23 Advisory Committees
- Transporter
- Guide
- Regional Advisory Council
- Board of Game (2 representatives)
- Big Game Commercial Services Board
- Federal Subsistence Board
- Agencies: ADF&G, DNR, BLM, FWS, NPS
- NANA Corp.
- Kotzebue IRA
- Maniilaq Association
- Northwest Arctic Borough

Participation by Alaska Prof. Hunters Assoc., DPS, DCCED, and the public (meetings carried on local public radio station with web streaming to listeners outside of region)
• Working Group is advisory only: its recommendations must be implemented by agencies or regulatory boards.

Objective:

• Original objective was to try to cooperatively reduce conflicts on a Unit-wide basis to avoid individual agencies pushing problems around the region.

2008-2011 Actions:

• Full working group met in Kotzebue six times

• Additional meetings in Kiana, Noatak and Shungnak

• Various subcommittees have met by teleconference several times
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Accomplishments:

Submitted 2 proposals to the BOG (2009):

• Expand dates of Noatak CUA from three to six weeks: passed

• Establish mandatory pilot orientation for Unit 23: passed

• Requested BGCSB to require commercial operators to provide latitude/longitude of their activities: letter from Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) requesting voluntary cooperation

• Requested legislation giving BGCSB authority to regulate transporters: legislation was introduced and supported by BGCSB but not enacted by Legislature

• Helped secure funding to put a DCCED investigator in Unit 23 during fall 2010 and 2011 hunting seasons
Accomplishments (cont.):

• Requested DCCED to merge commercial operator contract reports with ADF&G harvest data: in progress

• Established annual fall pre-hunting season coordination meetings during 2009-2011, hosted by NWAB, among state and federal management agencies, NANA Trespass program, and local communities to enhance coverage and sharing of resources and information

• Federal agencies developed and applied more consistent permit requirements for guides and transporters

• Agencies (primarily enforcement staff) have collected information on camp locations to try to assess whether airplane activity and drop camps deflect caribou movements
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Accomplishments (cont.):

• Substantially reduced waste of meat in the field and in Kotzebue primarily through public education efforts

Future:

• The WG reached consensus on actions involving education, data collection and management, enhanced enforcement & coordination, legislative needs and Controlled Use Areas

• However, the group has not been able to reach consensus on other topics, including specific ways to regulate transporters, whether there is a need to control numbers or distribution of visiting hunters, or concerns that activities during the hunting season may affect the timing and route of caribou movements

• Each of the 3 federal agencies are now conducting their own individual planning efforts to reduce conflicts in Unit 23 – coordination of these planning efforts is needed
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Future (cont.):

• When the WG met last May it decided to continue to meet annually as funding and need allow.

Current objectives:

• Serve as a forum to share information among agencies and users regarding the status of user conflicts & relevant information (e.g., DNR’s overhaul of guide area allocations).

• Provide opportunities for public comment and discussion with WG members (in person and via teleconference) regarding user conflicts.

• Provide a forum for federal agencies to coordinate their planning and permitting efforts with regard to user conflicts, and to update the rest of the group about what they are doing.

• Address new topics and recommendations raised by WG members.
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Future (cont.)

- Maintaining this WG is probably good for several reasons:
  - It takes 1-2 years (and substantial funding) to establish such a group before they can even begin to address the issues
  - It takes additional time for the participants to learn to work together before they can become effective
  - When the national economy recovers and there is money to spend, numbers of visiting hunters in Unit 23 will probably increase – could happen rapidly
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Future (cont.)

• When caribou are scarce during the fall hunting season (as occurred in 2009 & 2010):
  • Commercial operators push harder to put their clients where there are animals
  • Subsistence hunters range farther from home to get meat
  • Sensitivities to competition rise among all users

• The WAH has been declining since 2003 and it looks like that trend will continue

• Moose densities throughout Unit 23 are 0.03-0.60 moose/mi$^2$ – moose harvests will not be able to completely compensate for a large decline in caribou

• Considering only resource availability, conditions that tend to create user conflicts are likely going to become worse in the foreseeable future
Unit 23 User Conflicts

Future (cont.)

• Additionally, the State is considering establishing a road from the Dalton Hwy to the Ambler Mining District

• This road would eventually extend to the Nome road system (GMU 22) and Red Dog Road (GMU 23)

• It is well documented that roads affect the distribution & movements of wildlife

• Roads also affect people: ~25 yrs ago Department staff published a comparative study suggesting that roads were associated with lower subsistence harvests in Alaska for a variety of reasons

• Extending the public road system into traditional subsistence use areas will likely intensify user conflicts
Next meeting:

- The Unit 23 User Conflict WG will meet again in 2012 – probably during April or May in Kotzebue
GMU 23
Proposals
Charlotte Westing
Area Wildlife Biologist
Proposal 28

- Seeks to:
  - Reauthorize the antlerless moose season in Unit 23

This is a Department proposal

- Supported by: Kotzebue Sound AC, Noatak-Kivalina AC, and Northern Seward Peninsula AC
Unit 23: Moose

Proposal 28

Recommendation: Adopt

- Rationale:
  - Harvest of cow moose is low in Unit 23
Unit 23: Moose

 Proposal 28

 Recommendation: Adopt

 • Rationale-
   - Harvest of cow moose is low in Unit 23
   - Opportunities to harvest late season moose provides a valuable subsistence opportunity
   - Provides an additional resource in years when caribou are scarce or inaccessible
- End -
Blank slide for page break
Unit 23: Moose

 Proposal 6

• Seeks to:
  ▪ Eliminate early restrictions on issuing moose registration permits in Units 18, 19 and 23
  ▪ This presentation covers Unit 23 permits
  ▪ Instead of permits being available only from June 1-July 15, they would be available throughout the hunting season

 This is a public proposal

• Opposed by: Kotzebue Sound AC, Noatak-Kivalina AC, and Northern Seward Peninsula AC
Proposition 6

Recommendation: Do Not Adopt

- Rationale:
  - RM880 was put in place to address the following:
    - Increasing hunting pressure on moose in Unit 23
    - Increasing and persistent user conflict issues
    - Moose populations at low density (0.03-0.6 moose/mi$^2$) and possibly declining
  - RM880 was part of a suite of changes including:
    - Reduction in the resident season length
    - Reduction in the antlerless moose season
    - Drawing permits for nonresidents
Unit 23: Moose

Proposal 6

• Rationale (cont'd)
  ▸ Early season and in-unit registration uses discretionary permit authority. The department uses this authority with the direction of the Board.
  ▸ RM880 has been successful at:
    ✤ Slowing the increase in hunters targeting moose
    ✤ Retaining maximum opportunity for users (long seasons and any bull/any moose bag limits)
    ✤ Improving harvest data
    ✤ Distributing the burden of harvest reductions among users
Unit 23: Moose

Population Information

• Moose populations peaked in the mid-1980s then declined due to:
  - Severe winters
  - Extensive spring flooding
  - Starvation, predation, and loss of numerous calf cohorts

• Current population trends?
  - According to survey data- stability at low density
  - TEK suggests the population may still be declining
Hunting Opportunities

- General Moose Hunt
- RM880
- DM871-877
Unit 23: Moose

Hunter Participation Information

• Prior to RM880
Unit 23: Moose

Hunter Participation Information

- After RM880 and DM871-877
Unit 23: Moose

Hunter Participation and Harvest Numbers
Unit 23: Moose

Hunter Participation and Harvest Success

![Graph showing the number of moose hunters and success rates over time.](image-url)
Unit 23: Moose

Improved resident harvest data and permit compliance

FTR citations issued

Unit 23

Proposal 6 :Slide 18
Unit 23: Moose

Proposal 6 - Summary

Recommendation: **Do Not Adopt**

- **Rationale:**
  - The conditions that existed when RM880 was implemented are still present
    - There is substantial interest in moose hunting in Unit 23 and user conflict issues persist
    - Moose populations remain at low densities
  - RM880 has been successful at:
    - Distributing the burden of reductions among users
    - Slowing the increase of hunters targeting moose
    - Retaining maximum opportunity for users (long seasons and any bull/any moose bag limits)
    - Improving harvest data
- End -
Unit 23: Moose

 Proposal 29

• Seeks to:
  ◆ Allocate 50% of all nonresident drawing moose permits in DM875 to applicants who have completed guide/client agreements

 This is a public proposal

• No action by: Kotzebue Sound AC, and Noatak-Kivalina AC
• Opposed by: Northern Seward Peninsula AC
Unit 23: Moose

 Proposal 29

 Recommendation: None

- Rationale-
  - This proposal determines permit allocation between guided and unguided users
  - Requirement would likely be similar to guide/client agreements in Units 21(B), 21(D), and 24
Unit 23: Moose

AREA DESCRIPTION: Unit 23, that portion south of the north bank of the Kobuk River and Malviv Creek downstream of the Kobuk Valley National Park boundary near Trinity Creek, the Selawik River drainage, the Kobuk River drainage and Kaltuch Peninsula including the area and delta below the Kaltuch River mouth. This area includes: Kaltuch Peninsula, Kobuk River, portions of the Kobuk River drainage downstream of Kalmek, Selawik River, central and northern Selawik Hills, Taggigak River.
### Unit 23: Moose

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* 2011 hunt data are preliminary

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**Unit 23**

**Proposal 29: Slide 24**
Unit 23: Brown Bear

Proposal 30

• Seeks to:
  1. Set an annual harvest quota for bears, within the Noatak National Preserve
     - Based on a 3-year average harvest rate of less than 8 percent of the adult brown bear population.
     - Quota-based management would invoke emergency order closures of hunting by the Department when quotas have been reached.

This is a public proposal

• Opposed by: Kotzebue Sound AC, Noatak-Kivalina AC, and Northern Seward Peninsula AC
Brown Bear Population

Population Information

• 1987 Red Dog study with Sightability Correction Factor (SCF)
  Densities of 1 bear/25.7 mi$^2$

• 2008 study with NPS- final results pending, no SCF
  Preliminary minimum count 1.9-2.2 bears/25.7 mi$^2$

• Anecdotal reports, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and incidental observations – also suggest an increasing trend.
Brown Bear Population

2008 Lower Noatak Brown Bear Survey (NPS and ADFG)

- **group_type**
  - ★ Sow/cow
  - + Sow/yearling
  - ▲ Independent

- **stratum**
  - Red Dog Survey Area
  - Noatak NP

Additional Survey Area

Sampled
Brown Bear Seasons

**Resident Season**- Aug 1-May 31
- Bag limits
  - General season hunt: 1 bear/yr
  - or
  - RB700 subsistence hunt: 1 bear/yr

**Nonresident Season**- Sep 1-Oct 31 or Apr 15-May 31
- Bag limits
  - Drawing hunt: 1 bear/yr
Reported Total Brown Bear Harvest
## Brown Bear - Skull Size

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*Sealing data only*
# Brown Bear - Mean Age

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*Sealing data only*
Proposal 30 - Summary

Recommendation: **Do Not Adopt**

- Rationale:
  - Brown bear populations are not declining
  - No biological reason to restrict harvest
  - Harvest quotas rely on precise area specific data that does not exist
  - Many hunters use brown bears for food and would be impacted by this change
  - Requires creation of a new hunt area that overlaps federal boundaries, further complicating regulations
Unit 23: Wolves

 Proposal 13

 • Seeks to:
   ▶ Develop a Unit specific Amount Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) finding for wolves in Units 18, 22, 23 and 26A
   ▶ This presentation is for Unit 23

 This is a public proposal

 • Opposed by: Northern Seward Peninsula AC
 • No action by: Kotzebue Sound AC, and Noatak-Kivalina AC
Unit 23: Wolves

Proposal 13

 Recommendation: None

• Rationale-
  - Allocation to be determined by Board
  - No survey data or inventory of population
  - Wolf numbers appear to be high in Unit 23

Subsistence Division will summarize the harvest data
Unit 23: Wolves

Proposal 13

• Seasons and Bag limits
  ✤ Residents and Nonresidents
    ✤ Hunting- Aug 1-Apr 30, Bag limit: 20 wolves
    ✤ Trapping- Nov1-Apr 15, Bag limit: No limit

VIRTUAL no nonresidents use the trapping season due to the expense of the license
Unit 23: Furbearers

 Proposal 14

 • Seeks to:
   - Close nonresident trapping seasons for furbearer species in Unit 23 because ANS findings have not been established in Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A.
   - This presentation is for Unit 23

 This is a public proposal

 • Opposed by: Northern Seward Peninsula AC

 • No action by: Kotzebue Sound AC, and Noatak-Kivalina AC
Unit 23: Furbearers

Proposal 14

Recommendation: None

- Rationale-
  - Allocation to be determined by Board
  - Furbearer numbers seem to exhibit natural population variation independent of significant harvest

- Subsistence Division will summarize the harvest data
Unit 23: Furbearers

Trapping Seasons and Bag limits:

• No closed season, Bag limit: No limit
  - Beaver, squirrels, and marmot
• Nov 1- Apr 15, Bag limit: No limit
  - Coyote, arctic fox, lynx, marten, mink, weasels, river otter, wolverine, red fox, and wolves
• Virtually no nonresidents use the trapping seasons due to the expense of the license
Unit 23: Furbearers

Proposal 19

• Seeks to:
  ▶ Close nonresident hunting seasons for furbearer species in Unit 23 because ANS findings have not been established in Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A.
  ▶ This presentation is for Unit 23

This is a public proposal

• Opposed by: Northern Seward Peninsula AC
• No action by: Kotzebue Sound AC, and Noatak-Kivalina AC
Proposal 19

Recommendation: None

• Rationale:
  - Allocation to be determined by the Board
  - Furbearer numbers seem to exhibit natural population variation independent of significant harvest

- Subsistence Division will summarize the harvest data
Hunting Seasons and Bag limits:

- Wolverine - Sep 1-Mar 31, one wolverine
- Coyote and arctic fox - Sep 1-Apr 30, two each
- Beaver and squirrels - no closed season, no limit
- Red fox - Sep 1-Mar 15, ten foxes
- Lynx - Nov 1-Apr 15, two lynx