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NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday, October 30, 2013

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Winter Fortymile Caribou Season Cancelled

State and Federal winter hunting seasons for the Fortymile Caribou Herd (RC867) have been canceled because the annual herd harvest quota was achieved during the fall hunts.

The closure affects all four Hunt Zones in Units 20B, 20D, 20E, 20F, and 25C. In addition, hunters are reminded that the caribou hunting season in southern Unit 25B will remain closed to hunting to protect Fortymile caribou that have migrated into the area.

The Fortymile caribou hunting season for federally qualified subsistence hunters on federal land would have opened November 1 on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. The state season would have opened on state and private lands December 1.

State and Federal managers teleconferenced with the Fortymile Harvest Management Coalition on Wednesday to discuss the outcome of the fall Fortymile hunt (RC860) and whether or not to hold a winter season. Support for cancelling the winter hunt was unanimous among Alaskan and Canadian Coalition members.

The Coalition includes members of Central, Eagle, Delta, Upper Tanana–Fortymile, Fairbanks, Anchorage and Matanuska Valley Alaska Fish and Game Advisory Committees, and the federal Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, along with representatives of Yukon Department of Environment and First Nations of Canada.

The Coalition used guidelines set in the 2012-2018 Fortymile Caribou Harvest Management Plan to help make their decision about this winter's hunt. The plan sets conservative harvest quotas to allow the herd to grow, and recommends managing for harvest levels within 15% of the quota.

This year's annual harvest quota was 1,000 animals, with 250 reserved for the winter hunt. Many caribou moved into the hunt area near the Taylor Highway during the first days of the season, and other groups became accessible from the Steese Highway a few days into the hunt. Harvest reports indicate that about 1,200 caribou were taken during the fall hunt. The fall season is limited to bulls only.

"We don't expect negative effects on the herd because we were very close to the maximum quota, and because only a few cows were accidentally taken. But, since the entire annual quota has been taken, we can't justify a winter hunt," said Fish and Game Management Coordinator Roy Nowlin.

The herd is currently estimated at just under 50,000 animals.

Yukon has been strongly supportive of helping the Fortymile herd grow from a low of 5,000-7,000 caribou in the mid-1970s. Since international herd recovery efforts began in the mid-1990s, Canada has not allowed a hunting season for the Fortymile herd, instead choosing to have their harvest allocation contribute to herd growth. This year hunting seasons on two other caribou herds, the Porcupine and Hart River herds, were closed down in areas near Dawson, YK, because Fortymile caribou were present.

Hunting in Alaska has been allowed under a joint state/federal registration permit that doesn't limit the number of hunters, but closes seasons when quotas are met. This year caribou became so accessible during the fall hunt that quotas in Zones 1 and 3 along the Steese and Taylor Highways were exceeded within a few days.

Simply limiting numbers of Fortymile caribou hunters through a single drawing permit is not legal under the state subsistence law. Nowlin said the Department will be considering new methods of slowing harvest when caribou are easily accessible to prevent one- or two-day seasons.

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