



The Comeback Trail

News of the Fortymile Caribou Herd

July 2006

New Fortymile Herd Harvest Management Plan

by Jeff Gross

During the past year, a coalition of Fish and Game Advisory Committees (Central, Delta Junction, Eagle, Fairbanks and Upper Tanana/Fortymile ACs) worked together with members of the Alaska Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council (EIRAC), the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, Yukon Department of Environment and the T'rondeġk Hwēchġn First Nation to develop a new Harvest Plan for the Fortymile Caribou herd for 2006-2012. Staff from Alas-

ka Department of Fish and Game, Divisions of Wildlife Conservation and Subsistence, the Bureau of Land Management, the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge and the National Park Service provided technical support for this effort.

A draft of the new Harvest Plan was presented by the 5 ACs at public meetings during fall of 2005. Final changes were made to the Harvest Plan following these public meetings and the Plan was presented to the

Board of Game and Federal Subsistence Board during their spring 2006 meetings. Both Boards endorsed the Plan, which will go into effect during fall of 2006.

Efforts to rebuild the Fortymile Herd began in 1995, with the development of the Fortymile Caribou Herd Management Plan. This plan guided harvest from 1995-2000 and provided for a conservative harvest of 150 bulls annually between 1995-2000. The primary goal of this Plan was to provide conditions for herd growth. In 1999, with the herd increasing in size and the Fortymile Caribou Herd Management Plan soon to expire, several state fish and game advisory committees began a cooperative effort to develop a new Harvest Plan for the Fortymile Herd. The 2001-2006 Plan was developed to provide for additional harvest opportunity, while retaining the primary goal of herd growth. Under the 2001-2006 Harvest Plan, the Fortymile harvest quota ranged between 850 and 950 caribou annually.

Under the new Harvest Plan, the Primary Goal will be to promote continued growth of the FCH to meet intensive management population and harvest objectives and restore it to its historic range in both Alaska and Yukon.

The current Intensive Management Population and Harvest Objectives for

continued page 3

Predator Control Program to benefit the Fortymile Herd to begin in fall 2006

by Jeff Gross

During a special meeting, held during May of this year in Anchorage, the Board of Game voted unanimously to expand the Unit 12/20E Predator Control Program to include wolf control within most of the Fortymile Caribou range. The program was renamed the Upper Yukon/Tanana Predator Control Program (Control Program). This revision was in response to a recommendation in the new 2006-2012 Fortymile Harvest Management Plan (Harvest Plan), which was endorsed by the Board during their March, 2006 meeting. The Harvest Plan recommended that a wolf control program be implemented to reduce mortality on the herd and allow the herd to increase toward its Intensive Management Goal of 50,000-

100,000 caribou.

Since the early 1990s, ADF&G research has consistently shown that wolf predation is the primary source of mortality on the Fortymile Herd. Models indicate that between May of 2005 and May of 2006, 41% of all annual calf mortality and 62% of all adult mortality, was caused by wolf predation.

The wolf reduction objective, outlined in the revised Control Program, is expected to reduce mortality on the herd and allow for a moderate herd growth rate of 5-15% annually. The program is expected to begin during October or November of 2006 and is authorized for 5 years.

For more information on Wolf Control in Alaska, you can visit the ADF&G website at: <http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wolf.control>



**MILE
CARIBOU
HERD
PLANNING
TEAM
1994-2000**

The Fortymile Caribou Herd Planning Team sunsetted in December 2000. The Team was made up of individuals from Alaska and Yukon representing state, federal and territorial agencies and public organizations. The Team's goal was to restore the Fortymile caribou herd to its traditional range in Alaska and Yukon.

A summary of the Team's accomplishments was compiled in a Legacy Packet and is available for public review at the Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks, and offices of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game in Tok and Fairbanks.



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Visit our Website

**Fortymile hunting:
[http://www.state.ak.us/
adfg/wildlife/region3/
hunting/40mile.htm](http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/wildlife/region3/hunting/40mile.htm)**

Federal Funds Support Fortymile Caribou Management

By Terry Haynes

Under Section 809 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), has federal funds available to help manage subsistence resources, including the Fortymile Caribou Herd. In 1994, the OSM initiated a funding agreement with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to support development and implementation of the 1995-2000 Fortymile Caribou Herd Management Plan and later, the 2001-2006 Fortymile Harvest Management Plan. This funding helped to ensure the active participation of federally qualified subsistence users in planning for management of this herd. Both of these plans have helped to guide management of the herd since 1995.

ADF&G has used these federal funds primarily for aerial monitoring of the movements and distribution of radio-collared Fortymile caribou during the fall and winter hunting seasons. This information is used to structure the hunts so that seasonal and area harvest quotas are not exceeded and is particularly important for the Fortymile caribou hunt, which is administered by a joint state-federal registration permit and includes harvest quotas for federally qualified subsistence hunters. This is the only hunt in the state managed by a joint state-federal permit, which has significantly reduced the burden on federally qualified subsistence hunters.

In response to the growing popularity of the Fortymile hunt, the Tok office fields hundreds of telephone calls and issues thousands of permits each year. Staff also spends time in the field contacting hunters during the season, which has had a positive

influence on hunter behavior and improved compliance with the regulations. For several years, ADF&G operated a hunter check station on the Taylor Highway to document hunter success and other pertinent information. OSM funding has helped to ensure that our Tok office has the necessary resources to carry out these important administrative and public service functions.

Nelchina and Mentasta caribou migrate into Unit 12 in early winter and recently have continued moving northward into Unit 20E during the winter hunt. Although the state's winter caribou hunt in Unit 12 has been closed since 2000, our Tok staff has used OSM funding to continue aerial surveillance of these two herds, and to document their migration corridors and the timing of their movements into Units 12 and 20E. This information assists the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge in planning the federal subsistence caribou winter hunt in Unit 12, and enables our staff to design the Fortymile caribou winter hunt in Unit 20E so that the inadvertent harvest of Nelchina and Mentasta caribou is minimized.

For more than a decade, OSM has demonstrated its support of ADF&G's caribou management program in Units 12 and 20E by providing funding to supplement our limited resources. This investment has produced beneficial results by ensuring that the data necessary for effective caribou management and hunt administration are available each year.

*Terry L. Haynes, Ph.D.
Federal Subsistence Wildlife Coordinator
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation
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Harvest Management Plan cont...

the Fortymile Caribou Herd call for a population size of 50,000-100,000 caribou, with an annual harvest of 1,000-15,000 caribou.

The Secondary Goal of the new Harvest Plan is to increase the allowable harvest of the FCH when the herd grows. Under the new Harvest Plan, the annual Alaska Quota will be held at 850 caribou annually, with up to 25% cows, until the herd exceeds 50,000 caribou. Once the herd exceeds 50,000, the Alaska harvest quota will be increased to 1,000 caribou annually, with up to 25% cows.

During fall of 2006, Fortymile hunters can expect similar hunt conditions to last year; however, there will be several minor changes. Season dates and bag limits for both the fall and winter hunts will remain the same for fall of 2006. The quota will continue to be divided among the fall and winter seasons, with 75% of the Alaska quota allocated to the fall season and 25% to the winter season.

To allow for hunters in different parts of the herd's range to all have hunting opportunity, the fall and winter quotas will continue to be divided among the 3 traditional areas (the Steese Highway, Taylor Highway and roadless areas) within the herds range. Under the new Harvest Plan, these areas have been divided into 3 zones to allow for easier reporting and harvest tracking.

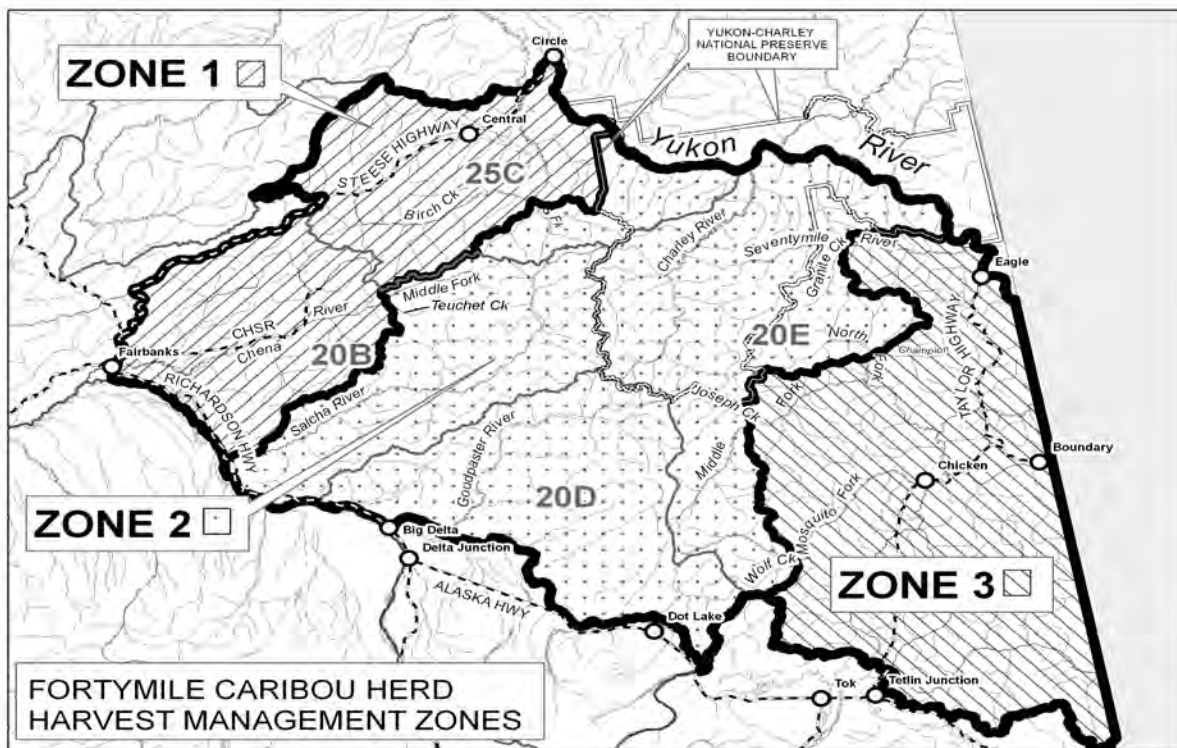
Zone 1: The road and trail accessible portion of the herd's range in the vicinity of the Steese Highway and Chena Hot Springs Road.

Zone 2: Generally, the portion of the herd's range that has few roads and trails and access is more difficult. This zone extends down to the Richardson Highway but very few, if any, caribou occur near the highway where they might be available for harvest.

Zone 3: The road and trail accessible portion of the herd's range in the vicinity of the Taylor Highway.

During the fall hunt, Zone 1 will be assigned 30% of the fall quota, Zone 2 will be assigned a minimum of 25% of the fall quota, (additional harvest will be permitted from this zone if caribou are not accessible in either of the other zones, but not to exceed the fall quota), and Zone 3 will be assigned 45% of the fall quota.

During the winter hunt, 60% of the winter quota will be allocated to the road accessible zone (either Zone 1 or Zone 3) where the majority of the herd is located immediately prior to the opening of the winter season. Zone 2 will be included in the 60% quota, even though large numbers of caribou are not expected to be readily accessible in that area. The remaining 40% of the winter quota will be assigned to the remaining Zone. This will allow harvest across the winter range, and prevent the season in one area from being closed because the entire winter quota is taken in another portion of the hunt area.



Following the Fortymile Herd

By Jeff Gross

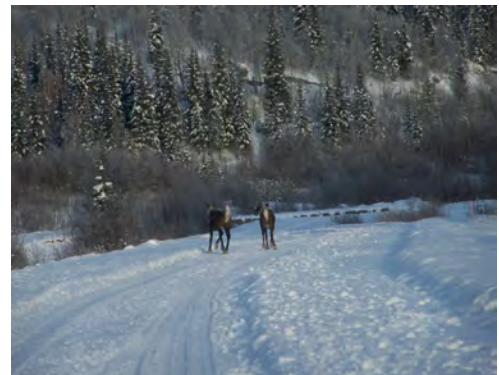
Blip, blip, blip goes the radio receiver, while the hum of the Super Cub plays in the background. As the Tok ADF&G Wildlife Biologist, I spend much of my time throughout the year in the backseat of a Super Cub following the Fortymile Caribou Herd. To accurately follow the herd, ADF&G staff maintains between 60 and 100 radio collars on cow caribou in the herd. These caribou are relocated at various times throughout the year to help collect population data and monitor movements of the herd.

Population data is collected throughout the year, to help track reproduction and mortality in the herd and to monitor various factors that impact the herd. These factors include predation, nutrition, weather events, disease and human activities. This information helps me develop management recommendations for the Board of Game and set the annual quota for the herd.

During the fall and winter hunting seasons I locate the herd 1-3 times a week to determine how close the herd is to the major highways and trails within the herds range. This information is made available to the public on the Fortymile Hotline (267-2310) to help hunters plan their trips and help me determine where harvest is likely to occur. Close monitoring of the herd allows me to anticipate when and where significant harvest may occur, which helps me decide when herd quotas are likely to be met. With this information, I am able to keep the season open as long as possible before announcing a closure and give hunters a heads-up on when the season may close.

Each fall, myself and other ADF&G staff spend several days placing new radio collars on 15-20 female calves in the herd to replace radio collars that were on caribou that died throughout the year. A Super Cub is used as a spotter plane to find the herd and a helicopter is used to get close enough to tranquilize each animal. Usually it takes about 12 minutes to dart, work and revive each animal. The shorter the time the animal is immobilized the better. While the **animal is immobilized, biological samples are collected and a radio collar is placed on the caribou's neck. I am happy** to say that in the 3 years I have helped collar caribou in the Fortymile Herd, we have successfully tranquilized nearly 70 caribou in the Fortymile Herd, without injuring a single animal.

I will be out flying again this fall and from what I have seen so far this year, there should be a lot of young caribou to choose from when putting out the new collars this year. Be sure and check the hotline before going hunting for updates on the location of the herd.



On the Comeback Trail: Herd Status Report through Spring of 2006

Advisory Committee Perspective

In 2001 the herd crossed the Steese Highway for the first time in about three decades. By November 2002 over 30,000 FCH animals were in Yukon, Canada and 5,000 were north of the Yukon River near Dawson. This was the first time since the early 1960s that Fortymile caribou crossed the Yukon River and a vast majority of the herd wintered in the Yukon.

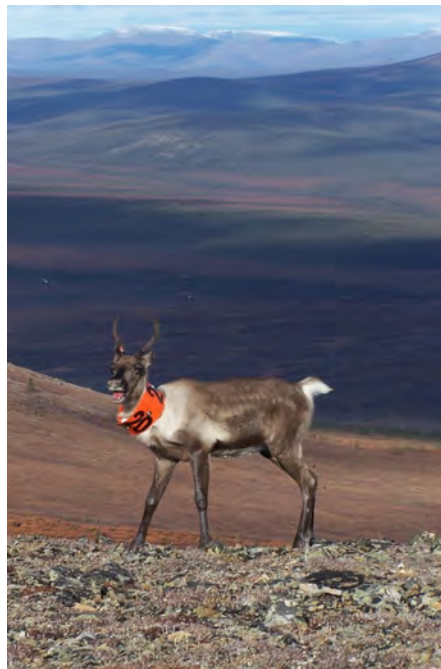
A photo-census of the herd was successfully conducted during summer of 2003, resulting in a population estimate of 43,375 caribou. By mid-May 2004, the FCH population decreased to an estimated 42,000 caribou. This decline was largely due to a very low percentage of births in the herd during 2003. Only 69% of the sexually mature cows gave birth in 2003, which was well below the 10-year (1994-2003) average birthrate of 88%. This low percentage of calves likely occurred because of adverse summer weather in 2002, which caused poor body condition in cows and decreased the pregnancy rate.

The FCH population further declined to an estimated 39,700 caribou by early May 2005. This decline was primarily due to elevated mortality of calves and adults during the winter of 2004 – 2005, which was caused by increased predation during adverse weather.

The herd size remained stable between May 2005 and May 2006, at about 40,000 caribou. ADF&G has concluded that herd size has likely stabilized and is expected to remain stable unless mortality associated predation is reduced.

In spring of 2006, the herd experienced a moderate birthrate of 80%. While this is less than in most recent

years, it still indicates the herd is very productive. There are a lot of young animals in this herd and with the right weather and some relief from predation the herd has excellent potential to continue to grow toward its goal. Remember, as a Fortymile Caribou hunter, you are a partner in the management of this herd. You can help by staying involved in the active management of this herd by trying to take a bull instead of a cow and participate in the upcoming predator control efforts.



Tinker article?????

**Hunters,
Please remember to turn
in your
report
on time!**

Thanks.



This beautiful Fortymile Caribou sign is being admired by a hoary marmot. These signs can be found at mile 96 of the Taylor Highway and mile 12 of the Top of the World highway and were designed by Lucia Zackowski of Tok Alaska .

Staff Contributions

Hunter Ethics:

As long time Alaskan hunters and ADF & G employees in Tok, we would like to encourage Fortymile Hunters to become more conscious of the meat salvage requirements for big game. In recent years, the number of caribou kill sites we have encountered that do not have all of the edible meat salvaged from the carcass has been disappointing. This is especially true on Chicken Ridge in August. This can be one of the best times to take a caribou during the Fall season, but high temperatures require hunters to bring their meat out of the field quickly to avoid spoilage. Big game salvage requirements include taking meat of the ribs, neck brisket, front quarters as far as the distal joint of the knee, hind quarters as far as the hock, and meat along the backbone between the front and hind quarters. While it is not required to take meat that has been damaged by the bullet, this does not mean you should leave excessive amounts of meat that could be cleaned up and salvaged. Taking all of the meat from an animal, and getting it out of the field before it spoils, is not just a legal requirement, it is the trademark of an ethical hunter and the essence of hunting. For full details on meat salvage requirements, please consult the 2006 Alaska Hunting Regulations.

Regulation Change:

For the fall of 2006, hunters will no longer be allowed to proxy hunt for Fortymile Caribou. During their 2006 annual meeting, the Board of Game passed new regulations concerning proxy hunting, including disallowing proxy hunting for Fortymile Caribou under the RC860 and RC867 registration permit or for Moose under the RM865 registration permit.

Safety:

Hunt participants are often new to this area and may not have much experience with **All Terrain Vehicles, (ATV's) in rugged terrain.** It has been an ego deflating experience for more than one resolute nimrod (great hunter) to have to dismount his 4 wheeler gracelessly while maneuvering a steep or **side hill and watch his "wheeler" tumble the rest of the way to the bottom.** We urge **caution to all hunters venturing afield in ATV's**

this page for chicken folks article

Fortymile Harvest for Fall and Winter Hunts

HUNT 2003	Total Permits	Male Killed	Female Killed	Hunted	Did not hunt
RC863 (Fall)	594	66	5	245	334
RC865 (Fall)	2427	244	38	1645	734
RC866 (Fall)	1596	152	40	898	642
RC867 (Winter)	1101	151	98	653	424

(In 2004, The fall registration hunt was combined into one area with one number, RC 860)

HUNT 2004	Total Permits	Male Killed	Female Killed	Hunted	Did not hunt
RC860 (Fall)	3220	451	82	1897	1234
RC867 (Winter)	997	144	161	601	305

HUNT 2005	Total Permits	Male Killed	Female Killed	Hunted	Did not hunt
RC860 (Fall)	3197	429	44	1799	1256
RC867 (Winter)	1242	127	138	679	519

Herd monitoring over the past three seasons has certainly shown that the Fortymile Caribou Herd's migration patterns were as usual, unpredictable! Many hunters who call us want to plan their hunting trips based on where the Fortymile herd will be on August 10th, but the caribou will most assuredly have the last word on this subject and they won't let Fish and Game in on their secrets.

During most of the summer and fall of 2005, the Fortymile herd was located well away from the highway systems and stayed in the central part of their range, and were virtually nonexistent in the Steese Highway area. Most of the harvest in areas accessible from the highway came along trail systems off the Taylor highway. Those hunting the Goodpaster and Upper Salcha by boat or by air transport, also saw some success.

During the winter of 2005- 2006, portions of the Fortymile herd made their way into Canada in late December, while many of the caribou remained in the eastern portion of the Fortymile country. In early July of 2006, the herd **was again in the central part of their range. Of course, by the time this hunting season takes place, it is anyone's guess where the caribou will be most accessible.**

Raidotracking begins a few weeks before hunting season opens, to locate collared animals. This gives the hunt managers an idea where the herd is prior to the hunt. Hunters will be able to call the Fortymile Caribou hotline, which is updated on a weekly basis. The hotline will have current herd and hunt information including any hunt closures or restrictions on any of the hunt areas.

The quota for the 2006 Fall Fortymile Registration Hunt, which reflects changes made to the Fortymile Harvest Plan, will be 290 to the Taylor Highway area and 190 for the Steese Highway. The roadless area, where hunters are accessing the herd by air or boat, will be allotted 160 animals. The winter hunt, RC 867, will have a quota of 210 caribou.

Remember to call the Fortymile Hotline at **(907) 267-2310** for updates on the Fortymile Caribou registration permit hunt.

The Comeback Trail
c/o Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game
P.O. Box 355
Tok, Alaska 99780-0355

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Hunters and the “Failure to Report List”

Hunters sometimes forget following the excitement of the hunt, that one of the most important aspects of a hunt, successful or otherwise, is the timely reporting of their hunt. Timely hunt reports are an important tool for hunt managers to help ensure hunting opportunities for future generations of hunters.

In an attempt to get more accurate data and encourage hunters to report in a timely fashion, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game began enforcing the existing reporting policy for the Fortymile Registration hunt in 2005. From now on, hunters who have not reported on their hunt within the required time period will **be put on a “Failure to Report” list.** Hunters who have been placed on this list will be unable to participate in any drawing or registration hunts the during the following year. Hunters failing to report may also be issued a citation by the Alaska Bureau

of Wildlife Enforcement. When a hunter acquires a Fortymile Caribou registration permit they are required to read and sign the permit, indicating that they understand all of the hunt conditions, including reporting on their hunt within the specified time period. By signing, the hunter also indicates they have read and understand the consequences of failing to report, which are also printed on the permit.

The information gathered from these hunt reports is invaluable to Fish and Game. Hunt quotas, conditions and seasons are all established using information from hunter reports. Incomplete information on these hunts affects all hunters. This data is especially important for the hunts with a quota like the Fortymile Caribou registration permit hunt. Your contributions are important to ensure the herd is managed correctly. Hunters, please report and save your-

self the aggravation of being put on the failure to report list and having hunting privileges suspended. Reporting can be done in two easy ways, either online, or by calling in your report to Fish and Game *and* filling out your report card and **dropping it in the mail** . **If you can't remember** if you have reported yet, you can always call and have someone from Fish and Game check the database to see if your report has been entered. Remember, there is a three day reporting period if you are successful harvesting an animal. All other reports are required within fifteen days of close of season. Taking a few minutes after your hunt to complete your report, will save us all time and effort and ensure the opportunity to hunt this great herd continues for years to come. It is your responsibility to report, not our responsibility to remind you.

