

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Comments to the Alaska Board of Game – January 2014

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Vern Cleveland, Sr. I am from Noorvik and am the Chair of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. I have two reasons for speaking to you today:

1. The first is to present the updated Cooperative Management Plan for the Western Arctic Herd that was written and approved by the Working Group in 2011.
2. The second is to present the Working Group's comments on two proposals that affect the Western Arctic Herd. These are Proposal 23, regarding the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd and Proposal 29, regarding sale of caribou antlers in Unit 23.

Background about the Working Group:

- The Working Group formed in 1995. It includes 20 members representing subsistence hunters from communities within the range of the herd, other Alaska hunters, guides and transporters, and conservationists. One non-voting member represents the State and federal agencies. The group meets in person once each year.
- This is a diverse group of people with different views on many things. But, all have agreed to work together to “ensure the long-term conservation of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd and the ecosystem on which it depends, and to maintain traditional and other uses for the benefit of all people now and in the future”. That is the mission of the Working Group.

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Cooperative Management Plan:

- In 2011, the Working Group updated the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Cooperative Management Plan. The first plan was written in 2003.
- The cooperative management plan lists actions that can be taken by the Working Group and others to ensure the long-term health of the Western Arctic herd and its habitat, and to maintain traditional and other uses of the herd.
- We are proud that the plan is unanimously supported by the Working Group's very diverse membership, which will make it more effective in meeting these goals.
- The plan has seven sections:
 1. Cooperation – urges cooperation among everyone interested in the Western Arctic Herd and its habitat

2. Population management – includes guidance for herd management and harvest levels depending on the population size and trend
 3. Habitat – supports getting more information about the herd’s habitat, and protection of its habitat
 4. Regulations – supports the existing State and federal regulatory processes, including the important role of advisory committees and regional advisory councils
 5. Reindeer – recommends actions to minimize conflicts between the reindeer industry and the herd
 6. Knowledge – recommends that scientific information, traditional knowledge of Alaska Native users, and knowledge of all users be considered in herd management
 7. Education – promotes educational programs about the herd
- The plan is also an important tool for communicating with users of the herd. For example, the population management section explains that when herd size and population trends change, there may be a need for changes in herd management and harvest. The Working Group has used its annual newsletter, *Caribou Trails*, to share this section of the plan widely. We want to make sure hunters are aware of recent declines in the size of the herd and that there may be a need to change harvest management in the future, through the regulatory process, if the declining trend continues.
 - Thank you for this opportunity to present the plan to the Board of Game. We ask that you read the plan and become familiar with the information it includes and the actions it recommends, with the goal of ensuring long-term conservation of the Western Arctic Herd.

Comments on proposals now before the Board of Game:

- Proposal 23 – The Working Group requests that the Board not take any action related to the Teshekpuk caribou herd that would negatively affect management of the Western Arctic Herd or the amount necessary for subsistence established for the herd.
- Proposal 29 – The Working Group voted unanimously to oppose the sale of caribou antlers harvested in Unit 23. The group is concerned that allowing the sale of antlers would encourage people to harvest caribou for the purpose of getting antlers for sale and it would lead to meat waste.