

**PROPOSAL 59**

**5 AAC 85.025(1). Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.**

Shorten the hunting season for Kenai Mountain caribou (DC001) in Unit 7 as follows:

Units and Bag Limits	Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(1)		
Unit 7 north of the Sterling Highway and west of the Seward Highway 1 caribou by drawing permit only; up to 500 permits may be issued	Aug. 10— <b><u>Sept. 20</u></b> [DEC. 31]	Aug. 10— <b><u>Sept. 20</u></b> [DEC. 31]

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Currently, the season dates for Kenai Mountain caribou under permit DC001 are August 10 – December 31. The historical harvest during the later portion of the existing hunting season (October 1 – December 31) is relatively low, averaging less than two caribou per year with 250 permits issued. Changing the closure date to September 20 from December 31 shortens the season by three months but would likely have little impact on harvest rates. By closing the hunt on September 20, we would avoid harvesting animals during the rut and align season dates for all caribou hunts on the Kenai Peninsula.

The number of caribou in the Kenai Mountain herd has decreased significantly in recent years and is now approximately 125–150 animals, down from peak numbers of approximately 400 animals. Given this decline, only 25 permits are issued each year compared to the 250 permits per year issued in the past.

It is the intention of the Department of Fish and Game to maintain an adequate number of collared animals in the Kenai Mountain herd to continue monitoring herd numbers. The current season dates dictate that we conduct our collaring efforts in the spring when the caribou are in their poorest condition. This timing increases the probability of capture related mortalities. The shortened season will allow managers to conduct radio collaring work in the fall when cows are in their best condition.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F18-039)

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