

PROPOSAL 19

5 AAC 5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Open a year-round, resident season for caribou bull harvest in Unit 23 as follows:

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Unit 23

RESIDENT HUNTERS: that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage:

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day; July 1– **June 30** [OCT. 14 - FEB. 1] however, calves may not be taken;

up to 5 cows per day; Sept. 1 - Mar. 31, however, calves may not be taken

Remainder of Unit 23

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou per day, by registration permit only, as follows:

up to 5 bulls per day; July 1 – **June 30** [OCT. 14 - FEB. 1] however, calves may not be taken;

up to 5 cows per day; Sept. 1 - Mar. 31, however, calves may not be taken

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? During the recent downturn in the Western Arctic caribou herd population, the local advisory committees considered supporting a variety of different regulations for conservation purposes. One of these was to limit the bull season from the former year-round to an abbreviated season that closed from October 14 until February 1. The thought was that mature bulls were rutting during the first half of this period and then were in recovery mode during the second half. Given that local people generally avoided mature bulls during this time it was thought to have little impact on traditional harvesting activities, but still provide some conservation benefit. It was also the case that for decades these mature bulls were targeted and very much accessible for harvest during their annual southern migration in September, so this season would still allow ample opportunity for bull harvest opportunities. However, in the last couple of years, the migration has stalled out during September with the main body of caribou becoming “stranded” in the middle of the Baird Mountains where they remain inaccessible to hunters from the major rivers in Unit 23. By the time the caribou resume their migration the season for bulls has already closed, this has caused harvest pressure to shift to cows. If the bull season remains open year-round, many hunters would take young bulls during the currently closed period, because they do not get rutted and stink like the mature bulls, which would relieve some pressure on the cows. For the conservation of the herd it would be more desirable to take bulls than cows and even in those cases where a hunter may have a difficult time telling a young bull from a cow, both would be open for harvest, so there would be no compliance issue, which currently may happen from time to time. Notably the decline of the herd has stabilized and may in fact be on the road to increasing, this would only be helped by putting in place regulations that encourage the harvest of bulls when either sex is open to take.

What will happen if this problem is not solved? The fall harvest in Unit 23 is likely to be unnecessarily cow heavy in years like the last couple when mature bulls are hard to come by and

when the season closes for bulls when young bulls would be selected for harvest in lieu of cows by many.

What solution do you prefer? Year-round bull season.

Does your proposal address improving the quality of the resource harvested or the products produced? It creates an opportunity and incentive for the harvest of young bulls in lieu of cows, contributing to the long-term growth and conservation the Western Arctic caribou herd.

Who is likely to benefit if your solution is adopted? Those who want a stable and growing Western Arctic Caribou Herd and local people who may inadvertently take a young bull during the current cow only fall season.

Who is likely to suffer if your solution is adopted? None.

List any other solutions you considered and why you rejected them. None.

PROPOSED BY: Kotzebue Sound Fish & Game Advisory Committee (EG-F19-041)
