

## **Regionwide & Multiple Units**

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### **PROPOSAL 1**

#### **5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep.**

Open an archery-only registration permit hunt in Units 23 and 26 for resident hunters when it is determined sheep hunting can be allowed in those areas as follows:

If or when it is determined that Unit 23 and 26A sheep populations can support a limited amount of hunting:

Registration hunt:

Unit 23 (east and west of the Etivluk River) to include the DeLong and Schwatka mountains within this unit or specific areas there within as determined appropriate by ADF&G.

RESIDENT HUNTERS: One ram, full curl or larger, by bow and arrow only.

Season: August 10 - September 20

Hunters must register for this hunt (in person at license vendors within Unit 23/26A) and report successful harvest within 48 hours of exiting the field.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** If and only if, it is determined the sheep population in Units 23 and 26A can again support hunting, the area should be open to hunting by bow and arrow only. Bow and arrow hunting is an important conservation management tool that provides hunting opportunity while minimizing harvest.

In August of 2014 an emergency order was placed on Unit 23 and 26A (West of the Etivluk River) to close all sheep hunting because of a marked decrease in the sheep population. Sheep population data for this area is not currently publicly available but if the biologists determine that this area can support a limited amount of hunting at any point in the future, it would make the most sense to open it as an archery only hunt. Creating an archery hunt would reintroduce hunting opportunity of all hunters.

Archery only hunting does not adversely affect opportunity in any way. It simply requires that hunters use a shorter range weapon. This will make the hunt a little more difficult but will maintain the experience of the hunt. Skilled and/or lucky hunters will still harvest rams but the overall impact on the population will be much lower than that of a rifle hunt.

Going forward, with sheep numbers across the state in general decline and agreement at recent state and national wild sheep conservation meetings that this problem is unlikely to improve in the future (climate change related weather events) we, as hunters, must accept that alternative management options such as temporary hunt closures or draw hunts may become increasingly necessary. Archery hunts provide an appealing alternative because they do not limit opportunity but do limit the harvest. Archery hunts have been used as management tools around the world for this reason and it's time that we consider this option more broadly in Alaska. If or when the sheep population in Units 23 and 26A has recovered enough to support some minimal amount of hunting it should be a registration archery only hunt.

This should be a registration hunt so that ADF&G can monitor the harvest and shut down the hunt if harvest reaches a biological threshold determined by ADF&G.

Of note, in the past there has been some resistance to transitioning existing rifle hunts into archery hunts because of the perception of some that this somehow decreases opportunity. It is, however, well established throughout the United States and in Alaska that all hunters are capable of taking advantage of archery hunts by the simple means of purchasing and learning to shoot a bow. Currently it's possible to buy an effective hunting bow for less than the cost of most rifles and to learn to shoot accurately in a matter of weeks.

**PROPOSED BY:** Paul Forward

(EG-F23-297)

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*Note: This proposal is also scheduled for the March 15 – 22, 2024 Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska as Proposal 139. Units 22, 23, and 26A will be considered at the Western Arctic / Western Region meeting. The board may defer final action on all Units to the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting.*

## **PROPOSAL 2**

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

Reduce the bag limit for taking caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A to four caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow as follows:

**RESIDENT HUNTERS: Four caribou [FIVE CARIBOU PER DAY] per year, however, no more than 1 cow may be taken.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Data from biologists at ADF&G illustrate there has been continued decline in the Western Arctic caribou herd (WACH). The July 2022 photo census estimated 164,000 caribou in the Western Arctic caribou herd which is down from 188,000 in 2021. Census numbers for past years: 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. In the two years between the 2019 and 2021 census, the herd declined nearly 12% per year. Additionally, data shows that the cow survival rate is at 71% in 2021, well below the herd's average of 81% (1981-2020). ADF&G presented this information to the WACH Working Group in December 2022.

At its annual meeting the WACH Working Group assigned the management level “Preservative, Declining” to the herd based on the current census (within the range of 130,000-200,000) and adult cow survival rate less than 80%.

In doing so, the WACH Working Group sees the immediate need to address the current herd decline by limiting the harvest of both bulls and cows to allow the herd population to begin to recover.

In the game management units identified above, the current bag limit is set at five caribou per person per day during the open periods for bulls and cows. The WACH Working Group proposes to change regulations to four caribou per person per year, with no more than one cow allowed.

**PROPOSED BY:** Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Vern Cleveland, Chair (EG-F23-208)

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*Note: This proposal is also scheduled for the March 15 – 22, 2024 Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska as Proposal 140. Units 22, 23, and 26A will be considered at the Western Arctic / Western Region meeting. The board may defer final action on all Units to the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting.*

### **PROPOSAL 3**

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

Close nonresident caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A as follows:

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd working group (WACH WG) proposes to close caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A to non-Alaska residents.

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: **No open season** [1 BULL].

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Data from biologists at ADF&G illustrate that there has been continued decline in the Western Arctic caribou herd (WACH). The July 2022 photo census estimated 164,000 caribou in the Western Arctic caribou herd which is down from 188,000 in 2021. Census numbers for past years: 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. In the two years between the 2019 and 2021 census, the herd declined nearly 12% per year. Additionally, data shows that the cow survival rate is at 71% in 2021, well below the herd’s average of 81% (1981-2020). ADF&G presented this information to the WACH Working Group in December 2022.

At its annual meeting the WACH WG assigned the management level “Preservative, Declining” to the herd based on the current census (within the range of 130,000-200,000) and adult cow survival rate less than 80%. In doing so, the WACH WG sees the immediate need to address the current herd decline by limiting caribou harvest to allow the herd population to begin to recover.

In a separate proposal, the WACH WG proposes a reduction in harvest for resident hunters. The working group feels that if harvest reductions are placed on Alaskans to allow the herd to recover, there should also be harvest reductions for non-resident hunters.

Currently, in the game management units identified above, nonresident hunters are allowed to harvest one (1) bull per year. The WACH WG proposes to close caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A to nonresidents.

**PROPOSED BY:** Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Vern Cleveland, Chair (EG-F23-209)

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## **PROPOSAL 4**

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

Align caribou seasons in Unit 26A and Unit 23, and reduce the bag limit as follows:

Align caribou harvest and seasons with Unit 26A remainder to reduce cow harvest in southern Unit 26A and Unit 23 north of and including Singoalik River Drainage as follows:

Five caribou per day **3 of which may be cows, cows with calves may not be taken; July 16-Oct. 15.**

[FIVE] **Three cows per day, cows with calves may not be taken. Oct. 16-Dec. 31.**

Five caribou per day **3 or which may be cows, no calves may be taken Jan. 1- March 15.**

[FIVE] **Three caribou per day cows only Jan. 1-Mar 15.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Western Arctic caribou herd has been in decline since its population peaked in 2003. In 2022 its population was estimated to be 164,000 which is below the ADF&G's population objective of over 200,000 animals. To address this decline we suggest reducing the harvest of cows in Unit 26A despite the understanding that the majority of harvest occurs on the Teshekpuk herd in northern and eastern Unit 26A. The Teshekpuk herd is stable to increasing based on the last photo census which enumerated 61,500 caribou in 2022.

**PROPOSED BY:** North Slope Fish and Game Advisory Committee (EG-F23-191)

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## **PROPOSAL 5**

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

Reduce the bag limit for caribou for RC907 resident hunters in Units 23 and 26A, and change the nonresident hunt to a registration permit with additional restrictions as follows:

Unit 23, that portion north of and including the Singoalik River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS: five caribou per **season, no more than one of which may be a cow,** [day, as follows: up to 5 bulls per July 1 - Oct. 14 day; however, calves Feb. 1 - June 30 may not be taken; up to five cows per day; Jul. 15 - Apr. 30 however, calves may not be taken]

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: one bull; however, calves Aug. 1 – Sept. 30 may not be taken;

Remainder of Unit 23

RESIDENT HUNTERS: 5 caribou per **season, no more than one of which may be a cow,** [day, as follows: up to five bulls per day; July 1 - Oct. 14 however, calves may not Feb. 1 - June 30 be taken; up to five cows per day; Sept. 1 - Mar. 31 however, calves may not be taken]

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: one bull; however, Aug. 1 - Sept. 30 calves may not be taken; . . .

Unit 26A, that portion of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Anaktuvuk River, and drainages of the Chukchi Sea south and west of, and including the Utukok River drainage

RESIDENT HUNTERS: five caribou per season, no more than one of which may be a cow, [day, as follows: up to 5 bulls per July 1 - Oct. 14 day; however, Feb. 1 - June 30 calves may not be taken; up to five cows per day; Jul. 15 - Apr. 30 however, calves may not be taken];

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: one bull; however, July 15 - Sept. 30 calves may not be taken;

Remainder of Unit 26A

RESIDENT HUNTERS: five caribou [bulls] per season, no more than one of which may be a cow, [day: July 1 - July 15 however, calves may not be taken; five caribou per day; July 16 - Oct. 15 however, no more than three cows per day; cows accompanied by calves and calves may not be taken; three cows per day; Oct. 16 - Dec. 31 however, calves may not be taken; five caribou per day; Jan. 1 - Mar. 15 however, no more than three cows per day; calves may not be taken; five bulls per day; Mar. 16 - June 30 however, calves may not be taken;]

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: one bull; however, July 15 - Sept. 30 calves may not be taken;

**RESIDENT HUNTERS: season limits above would modify all hunts within RC907. NONRESIDENT HUNTERS in both Units would no longer harvest pursuant to a harvest ticket but instead a new registration hunt would be established with a quota to be determined by ADG&F as herd management objectives dictate but no less than 400 bulls.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** This proposal is to change the type of hunts (Harvest Ticket (HT) and Registration) and harvest limits for caribou in Units 23 and 26A that affect the Western Arctic caribou herd (WACH). Much concern has been raised in recent years by various stakeholders over the decline in numbers of the WACH. While the department has clearly determined that the herd remains large enough for subsistence and non-local hunting, efforts to better monitor the annual harvest (through use of registration hunts) and control over season harvests (quotas) would allow the department to closely monitor and limit the effects of subsistence and non-local hunting if needed, while continuing to allow for hunting access to all users. This proposal reduces the extremely liberal harvest limits for residents within the WACH's range and makes nonresidents subject to a registration hunt. This proposal would hopefully eliminate the need for unnecessary closure of federal (or other) lands to hunting by any individuals and allow hunting access to the entirety of both units to all residents and nonresidents. The impact that the small percent of harvests by non-locals could have on the caribou herd pales in comparison to the impact of closing federal hunting opportunities in Units 23 and 26A for non-subsistence hunters. A far more reasonable protective measure (if any is needed) to help slow the decline of the WACH is to drastically reduce the harvest of cows and calves and narrow the limit on the annual harvest of bulls between subsistence and non-subsistence users. As non-subsistence users account for only a percent or two of the annual harvest, closing substantial portions of the units to this non-impactful group does nothing to promote the objective of protecting the WACH. This proposal is made as an effort to allow the department to better monitor and control the harvest of caribou by all users as needed to meet and maintain management objectives.

**PROPOSED BY:** Gary Colbath

(EJ-F23-667)

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