



Caribou Trails

Tuttu Tumai Bedzeyh Tene Tuntut Tumait

News from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Summer 2025, Issue 25

**Western Arctic Caribou
Herd Working Group**
westernarcticcaribou.net

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Herd status remains at preservative declining

Due to the continued decline of the Western Arctic Herd (WAH), the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group voted to maintain the herd’s status as “preservative declining” at its annual meeting in December 2024.

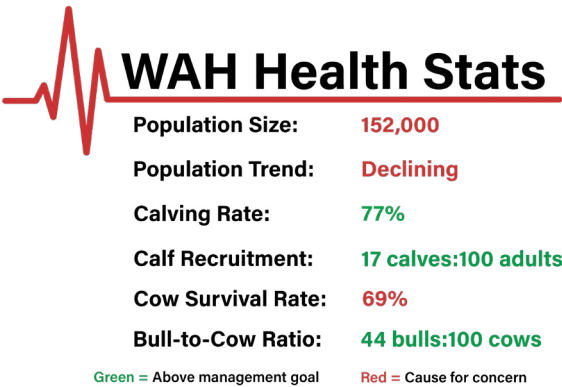
The preservative declining status is based on a table created to guide population management of the WAH. Managing the herd involves key factors including the current population, the annual survival rate of adult cows, the number of calves that survive to be one year old, and whether the herd is growing, stable, or declining. The most recent herd census of 152,000 caribou in July 2023 was a decrease from the 164,000 counted in 2022, continuing a 20-year decline. Since 2017, the herd population has declined by 100,000 animals. When herd numbers range from 130,000 – 200,000, the management plan calls for more monitoring and stricter harvest restrictions.

High winds, cloud cover, and rain caused caribou aggregations to break apart and prevented an Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) photocensus attempt in the summer of 2024. A census was conducted in July of 2025 but the final count is not yet available. However, results from other surveys conducted by WAH caribou biologist Alex Hansen suggested no significant change in herd status from the previous year. In April of 2024, a short-yearling (a not-quite year old calf that survived its first winter) survey found the number of calves reaching adulthood was slightly above the herd’s long-term average. Another survey in June of 2024, found that calving rates were slightly

above the herd’s long-term average. However, for the past several years adult cow survival (the most important metric of population growth or decline) has been below the long-term average of 80% and well below the 88% needed for herd growth for several years now. Higher cow survival rates are critical to slowing and, eventually, reversing the decline. A single cow caribou and her offspring have the potential to add 53 caribou to the herd over 12 years.

Since December 2021, the Working Group has recommended more restrictive harvest regulations, especially limiting cow harvest. On July 1, 2024, new state and federal regulations took effect. Both rolled out a new bag limit of 15 caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow. The Federal Subsistence Board closed all federal lands in Game Management Unit 23 to hunters who are not federally qualified subsistence users. While the regulation changes are a step in the right direction, biologists caution that the estimated harvestable surplus based on the 2023 count was approximately 7,300 caribou and fewer than 750 (~10%) of the available harvest should be cows. While actual harvest numbers are not known, historical harvest estimates indicate the harvestable surplus is in danger of being exceeded. In short, the WAH has little to no cows to spare and any cow left to live can add to the population for many years to come. Please do what you can to conserve cows to help the herd recover.

You can learn more about management levels in the Working Group’s management plan at westernarcticcaribou.net/herd-management.



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QUYANAQ

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group would like to say QUYANAQPAK to those who take time to fill out RC907 (Units 23 and 26A) and RC800 (Unit 22) caribou registration permits. Permit reporting provides valuable information on harvest, behavior, and caribou distribution. By providing this information you are helping biologists better understand the caribou to support hunting now and for future generations.

Updates from the Working Group Meeting

Message from the Chair



Noorvik had no fish in the summer of 2024. There was high water, erosion, and fires. The weather has changed drastically, and it is hard to predict what will happen in the fall.

Caribou did come into Noorvik a couple of weeks before the meeting in December. It was very exciting to have caribou in the field and to teach younger guys what to shoot, what not to take at that time of year, and what to take from the caribou. It was fun to show them how to skin, gut, and take whatever is edible from the caribou home. A lot of them were surprised how much we can get out of the caribou.

Working Group members come from all over the state, and we have different problems in some of our areas. Sometimes it might be difficult, we might not agree, but we do the work we came to the group to do. It is important to have Working Group members in all the seats, so we are working to have every seat filled, and we are working together to preserve the caribou herd for the future.

We would like to send our condolences to the family of Steve Oomittuk. Taikuu for his service! He will be missed.

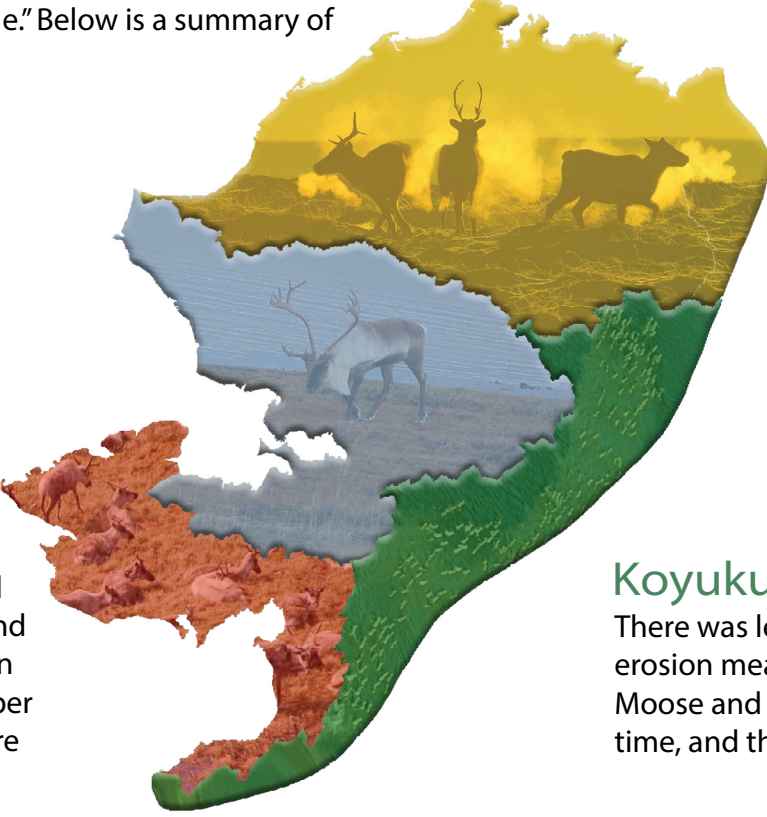
Vern Cleveland
Noorvik Alaska

Caribou in your region

Each year members of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group share their observations during the “Caribou Round Table.” Below is a summary of the 2024 discussion.

NANA Region

Unusual fall weather. Kobuk Lake froze later than normal. Kotzebue, Noorvik, and Selawik had caribou. Upper Kobuk had a few caribou. No caribou at Onion Portage.



North Slope

Weather was unpredictable - sea ice played a major role. Ice had formed but had open water again just before December meeting.

Seward Peninsula

It was a wet summer. Hunters had to travel long distances for caribou. Both hunters and reindeer herders were worried about ice on vegetation because of the increased number of melt/thaw events on the peninsula. More wolves were seen.

Koyukuk & Middle Yukon

There was less snow, more rain, and erosion meant land was lost into the river. Moose and caribou were having a hard time, and there were lots of wolves.



Our Elders Speak

Guest Elders - Fred & Frieda Eningowuk



Guest elders Fred and Frieda Eningowuk hunt when they have the opportunity to put food on the table. Fred remembers times when, “we didn’t have any meat in our freezer and that was a time when your cholesterol goes up...Store-bought food is not very healthy but living off the land, it keeps your spirits high. Physical activity keeps you healthy.”

There are now caribou near Shishmaref in Unit 22E most of the year, but the

Eningowuks have been hunting caribou since long before the caribou were so close to town. In their younger days, they would go to Deering and Buckland and sometimes they would go toward Selawik to hunt.

Frieda says there still are times when the caribou are farther away, and then they are grateful their sons are always willing to hunt caribou. Occasionally, they go up the coast between Shishmaref and Kotzebue, but they cannot go down the coast because there are reindeer grazing down that way. Frieda and Fred and their two boys will travel the 55 miles to Serpentine Hot Springs during the winter and spring when they need meat because there are caribou there all year round. In winter, hunting on park land is easier because they can use snowmachines and haul their harvest in plastic sleds, but other times of year when the meat needs to be hauled a long way, Frieda and Fred are happy their boys are with them most of the time because they are not getting any younger, and four wheelers cannot be used in the park.

Thirty or forty years ago, caribou were not found at the hot springs according to the Eningowuks. When the caribou began showing up in the area, Fred was among the first hunters who harvested caribou there not knowing that the area was closed to hunting until the authorities showed up at their

houses and confiscated the meat. Not too long after that incident, 22E was opened for caribou hunting.

Changes in land status and hunting regulations are just some of the many changes Fred and Frieda have observed in their many years of hunting and butchering caribou and marine mammals. In the last few years, they have noticed more caribou livers with spots, or white cysts on them - sometimes the liver is almost white which is a big concern because organs like the liver tell a lot about the health of an animal. Although the Eningowuks can’t say exactly why this is happening they say there are several things happening on the landscape that put stress on the caribou. Fred notes caribou are very, very sensitive to noise. He has seen caribou spooked by boaters revving their motors, Fish and Game planes counting moose and caribou, and Park Service planes flying around. Based on what he has seen, caribou leave areas where there are muskoxen. There are also changes in climate that might be affecting the food caribou eat. Fred and Frieda are aware the caribou are declining, and they hope the new limits on harvest will help.

“Shishmaref elders, long ago, said caribou would come back, and they did. They also said there were gonna be hard times, and maybe those hard times are coming around now,” says Fred.

The importance of caribou (even when they are not around)

Working Group member Mickey Stickman says Nulato “is medzeyh country. Even though I grew up without caribou, I always knew I was caribou clan because sometime in the 1920s the men built a tribal hall, and they put a pole next to it. Atop that pole was a set of caribou antlers. We also have a chant to bring caribou in the new year, Kaltag has the same chant. Medzeyh okko hudnee, hudnee. Medzeyh okko hudnee, hudnee. Medzeyh okko hudnee, hudnee.”

It has been about a hundred years since there were caribou in his area after massive wildfires in the early 1900s. Those fires burned thousands of acres of lichens. Without their food supply, the caribou had to go somewhere else, according to Mickey. Before the fires, people of his grandparents’ generation hunted caribou in the immediate area and traveled about 20 miles upriver.

Now the people of Nulato have three options for hunting caribou. Most often they wait until the caribou cross the winter trail between Kaltag and Unalakleet - a 130-mile trip by snowmobile through the pass at Kaltag along the same trail as the 1925 Serum Run (Iditarod Trail). Another option is the Galena Mountain herd. This small herd has only a little more than a hundred caribou, but if they get close enough, Mickey says “we go take a look.” Their other option requires traveling an even greater distance. The caribou are usually between Allakaket and Hughes which means traveling 90 miles cross country from Nulato to Huslia, then another 85 miles to Hughes, or traveling even further still to the Shungnak area. Traveling more than 300 miles roundtrip to hunt is a new thing for people of Mickey’s generation.

Historically, though, there was a lot of travel from Nulato to Huslia and on to the Upper Kobuk River villages of Ambler and Shungnak where they would trade their salmon for seal oil, and some had relatives among the families there of mixed Athabascan and Iñupiaq descent.

Several years ago, Mickey took a winter trip to Huslia and the nearby hot springs. The trip provided an opportunity “to hang out with elders and look at the country. It was all brand new...you have to pay attention because you need natural way points to navigate,” he notes. Trips like these are a way of teaching and learning about changing ice conditions which have increased the risk of winter travelers breaking through the ice.

Mickey grew up in fish camp and has spent much of his life fishing for Yukon kings, summer chum, fall chum, and then fighting the pollock industry because of declining salmon returns. When Mickey learned countries across the Arctic were gathering to make decisions about fish, he says “I kind of inserted myself” into the Arctic Council on which he served from about 1996-2022. Mickey estimates salmon were about 65 percent of the diet in Nulato, but there has been no salmon for the past six years making the fall and winter moose hunts essential for the people of Nulato.

“Even though [we] don’t have caribou in our area now, that doesn’t make caribou less important...it should make them more important. In the past, caribou were important because we had no moose...and it is possible they could come back again.”



Reindeer - Nulato, AK. Carpenter Collection, Library of Congress.

Migration

Changes in migration

Across the region, people are noticing change in the migratory patterns of the Western Arctic Herd (WAH). While it’s true that caribou migration routes vary from year to year, these recent changes are notable. For example, in 2013, over 90% of collared caribou crossed the Kobuk River on their southward fall migration but, in 2020, only 6% did so. While these are the extremes, on average, about half as many caribou crossed the Kobuk River in fall (42%) from 2016-2023 compared to 82% in previous years (2010-2015). The first collared caribou crossed the Kobuk River on August 28, 2010. Ten years later, the first collared caribou crossed the river more than two months later, on November 2, 2020. Again, the averages are less extreme but still show crossings occur about a month later than they used to (October 5 versus September 8).

Besides large changes in the numbers and timing of caribou migrations, there have also been large changes in where the caribou go. In the fall of 2014, more than 85% of the collared caribou went to the Seward Peninsula. For the past 7 years,

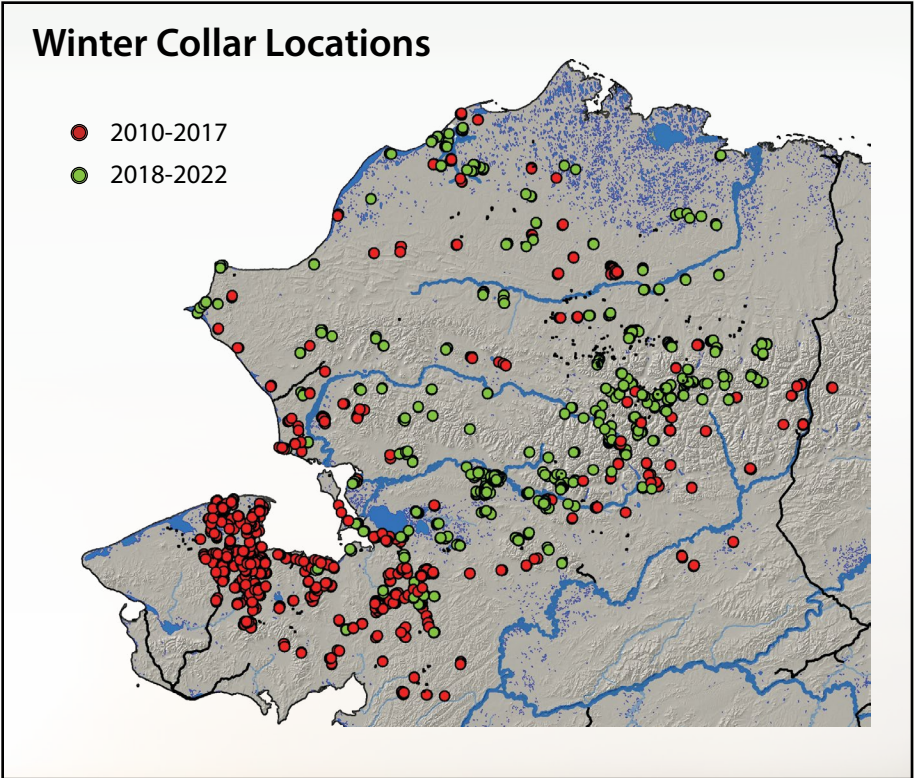
however, almost no collared caribou have traveled to the peninsula for the winter. More caribou have been wintering in the Brooks Range in recent years.

The range of a caribou herd is related to the size of the herd. The WAH is a large herd. Big herds migrate further and use a larger area than small herds. In a year when caribou move through a village, perhaps even using the runway or roads in town, it may seem like WAH caribou are plentiful. Then, caribou may not come close to the village again for a couple of years making caribou numbers seem sparse. The WAH has been declining for more than 20 years and has lost over two-thirds of its peak size of 490,000 caribou. As the herd declines, villages at the edge of the range may no longer see caribou. The WAH rarely moves as far south as Unalakleet anymore and has not been seen there for 20 years. However, when the herd population was at its peak, it was common to find them wintering there.

In addition to changes in herd size, weather and habitat also play important roles in caribou migrations. Local

knowledge and western science have shown that accumulating snow and colder temperatures help start migratory movements and both are often coming later in the year which may play a part in the trend toward later migrations. Changes in habitat also impact where caribou migrate. In the fall, WAH caribou tend to migrate to areas with more lichens, their favorite winter food. Lichens have declined in some parts of the herd’s range, most notably on the Seward Peninsula, which may be related to why the herd has used the area less frequently.

All these changes in WAH migrations have important harvest implications for caribou hunters. Less migration often means less caribou available to hunters. Late migrations can mean hunters intercept caribou during the rut when bulls are not edible. Additionally, caribou traveling during freeze up can make travel dangerous for hunters. WAH migration patterns are expected to continue to change with a changing climate. Hunters will also likely have to adapt, collaborate, and find new paths forward in response.



While the bulk of the Western Arctic Herd used to overwinter south of the Brooks Range on the Seward Peninsula - near communities such as Deering, Buckland, and Shishmaref - most of the herd stayed north of the Brooks Range from 2018-2022. There was no centralized group with many different smaller portions of the herd scattered across the North Slope and Brooks Range.



Development Updates in the WAH Range

There is much uncertainty regarding development in the range of the Western Arctic Herd. Orders from the White House and Department of the Interior (which houses the Bureau of Land Management [BLM], National Park Service [NPS], and other agencies) called for actions to reduce land protections and increase permits and leases for energy and natural resource projects in the herd range.

1. Ambler Road Project

Recent orders switch from a 2024 decision not to approve the Ambler Road back to the 2020 decision approving the road. The Department of the Interior also indicated that to facilitate building the road it will seek to convey lands along the Dalton Highway and Trans-Alaska Pipeline Corridor to the State of Alaska. The State approved a right-of-way application for building the road in April. If constructed, the road would cover over 200 miles across state, federal, and Native Corporation lands between the proposed Ambler Mining District and the Dalton Highway, crossing WAH migration and winter areas.

The Working Group opposes the road due to concerns about its potential impacts on the herd and subsistence.

2. National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska

Land management in the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (NPR-A) follows an Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) that specifies which areas are open for oil and gas development and which are set aside to protect important species, habitats, and subsistence. In June, BLM announced removal of a 2024 rule that provides stronger protections for caribou, and reversion to the 2020 IAP, which would reduce the area protected from leasing around the calving grounds of the WAH and open the entire Teshekpuk Caribou Herd calving area to leasing.

The Working Group has repeatedly requested that BLM protect caribou calving grounds and other critical habitat in the NPR-A.

3. D1 Lands

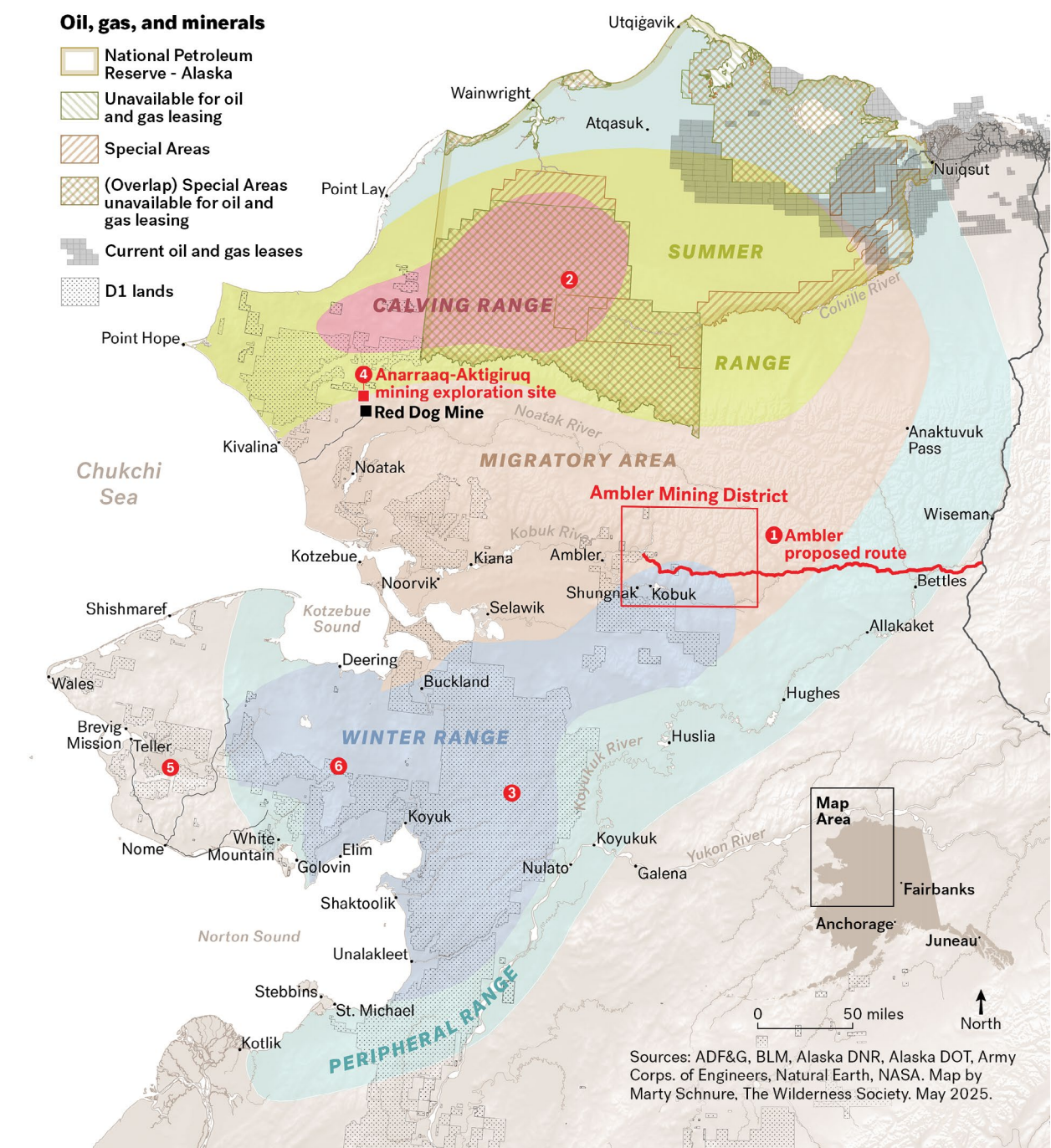
D1 lands were set aside by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to be unavailable for mineral and energy development and protect the public interest. In 2024, BLM decided to maintain these protections but the new orders indicate interest in opening the lands to leasing. These lands overlay WAH calving, summer, migration, and winter ranges, which could lose Federal subsistence priority if D1 withdrawals are eliminated.

Out of concern for this, the Working Group asked BLM in 2024 to maintain their protection of D1 lands.

4. Red Dog Mine Expansion

Current mining at Red Dog is set to run out in 2031 but the Anarraaq-Aktigiruaq mineral deposits, about 8 miles north of the current Red Dog Mine, could extend operations. In 2024, the Army Corps of Engineers approved a permit to allow building about 12 miles of roads and other infrastructure that would allow exploration to proceed.

The Working Group commented on earlier applications for exploration, encouraging protections for caribou and subsistence, but took no formal position for or against the project.



5. Graphite One Mine

Graphite One is a proposed graphite mine on the Seward Peninsula. The project completed a preliminary feasibility study in 2022 and received subsidy funding from the Department of Defense. Graphite One plans to continue with a full feasibility study that may lead to applications for permits and opportunities for public comments.

6. Boulder Creek Mine

Boulder Creek is a uranium mining exploration project located about 30 miles north of Elim on the Seward Peninsula. Panther Minerals announced in October 2024 that their exploration permit had been approved by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, allowing surface exploration and drilling at two main locations thought the end of 2028. The permit was challenged and a decision has not been made.



**The views expressed here are those of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and do not necessarily represent those of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game or other agencies who support the Working Group.*

Western Arctic Caribou Herd - Working Group Constitu

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Membership

The December 2024 meeting of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group began with a moment of silence for past Working Group members Enoch Mitchell and Charles Saccheus. Enoch represented Noatak and Kivalina from 2016 to 2023. Charles Saccheus represented the communities of Elim, Golovin, and White Mountain from the early 2000s to 2024.

Alternate Morris Nakaruk represented Elim, Golovin, and White Mountain communities at the meeting. However, the seat for Noatak and Kivalina had no representation at the meeting and has been without representation for the past few meetings. Noting the presence of several residents from those two communities in the audience, a suggestion was made on the floor to fill the Noatak/Kivalina seat prompting Vice-Chair Cyrus Harris to note, “procedurally it is ACs [local Alaska Department of Fish and Game advisory committees] or tribes who fill the seats on the Working Group.” How Working Group members are selected and the process by which an alternate becomes the primary member were recurring themes throughout the meeting, and those two issues dominated discussion during the business meeting.

There are 20 seats on the Working Group representing different communities and constituencies with an interest in conserving the herd. Each seat has a primary member and an alternate who attends the annual meeting if the primary cannot attend. Although the Working Group does generally vote on whether an alternate can function as the primary representative for a seat, the alternate is seated for a single meeting only. The group also determines its officers, committee rosters, and number of seats, but each of the primary and alternate members is “selected by his own constituency and serves at the pleasure of that constituency” according to the Working Group’s by-laws. Most seats are selected by tribal councils, regional advisory committees (ACs), or some combination of these two entities. At the time this article was written, six primary seats and three alternate positions were vacant.

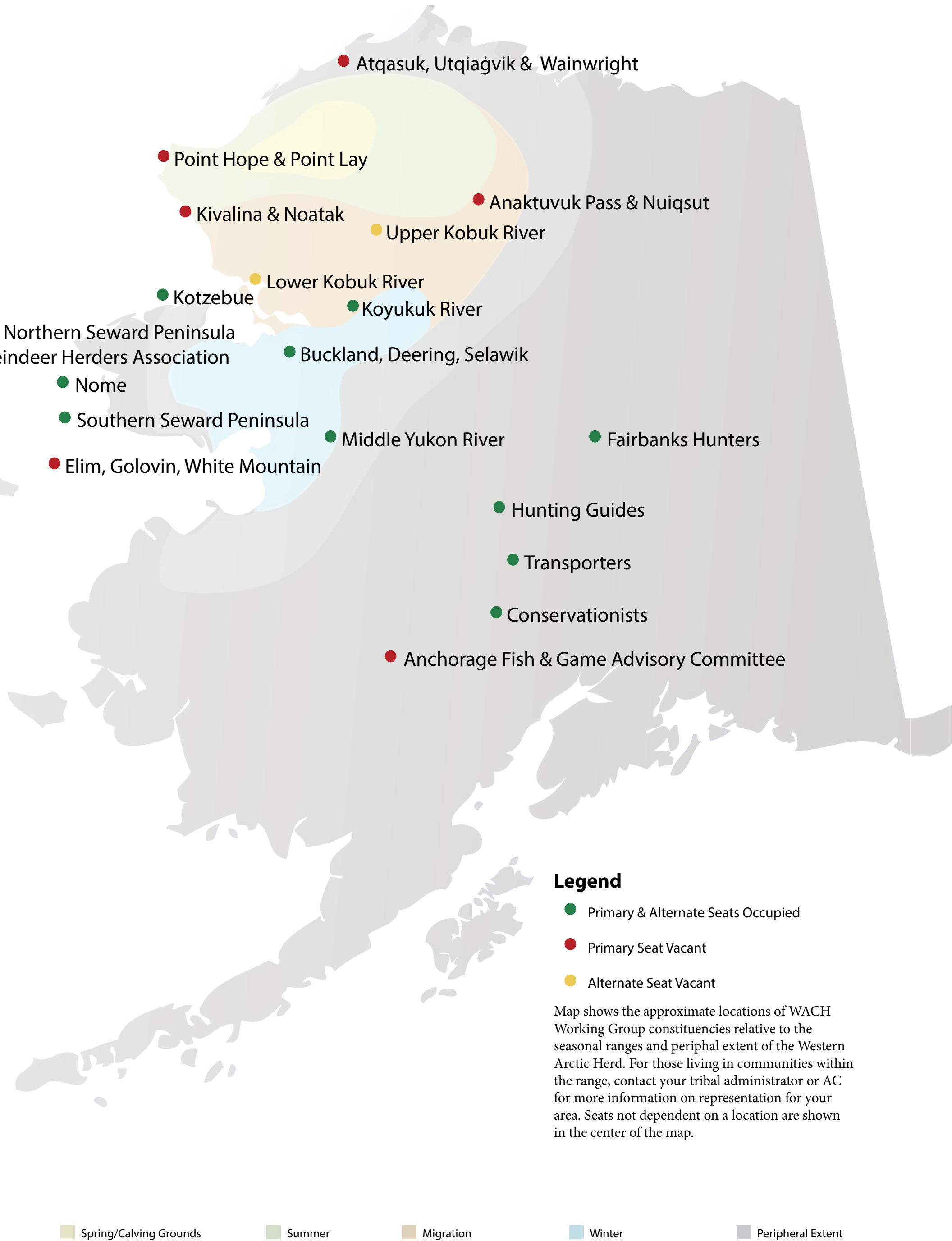
Long-time Working Group member Tom Gray noted that “for the working group to function as intended, it needs its members to represent their constituencies.” He is the Chairman of his Native Corporation, but Tom was elected by the Reindeer Herders Association, so he represents the interests of reindeer herders on the Working Group. Chair Vern Cleveland represents the Lower Kobuk, and he was selected by the Noorvik tribal council to represent the area. Charlie Lean represents the Nome area where the selection process involved a dialogue between the AC and the tribal councils in the area – ultimately the AC selected him to be the primary, and the tribal councils selected Jacob Martin as the alternate member. Mickey Stickman initially served as the alternate for the Middle Yukon seat and became the primary representative after a vote by Middle Yukon AC. Although the way other seats on the Working Group are filled may vary from these examples, the recurring theme is all representatives are chosen by the constituencies they represent.

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group includes subsistence hunters living within the range of the herd, reindeer herders, other Alaskan hunters, conservationists, hunting guides, and transporters who work “together to conserve the Western Arctic Caribou Herd and the habitat on which it depends, and to preserve traditional and other uses of the herd.”

More information about the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group can be found on page 12 of this issue and at westernarcticcaribou.net. If you are interested in filling a vacant position and representing your community on the Working Group, reach out to your tribal council, AC, or the Working Group.

Unit	Advisory Committee	Villages	Status	Regional Coordinator
Unit 21/Unit 24	Koyukuk River	Allaket, Bettles, Hughes, Huslia, Wiseman	Active	Kyle Campbell kyle.campbell@alaska.gov (907) 459-7263
	Middle Yukon	Galena, Kaltag, Koyukuk, Nulato	Active	
Unit 22	Northern Norton Sound	Brevig Mission, Elim, Golovin, Nome, Shishmaref, Teller, Wales, White Mountain	Active	Sam Kirby sam.kirby@alaska.gov (907) 269-6977
	Southern Norton Sound	Koyuk, Shaktoolik, St. Michael, Stebbins	Active	
Unit 23	Kotzebue Sound	Kotzebue	Active	
	Lower Kobuk	Kiana, Noorvik, Selawik	Not Active	
	Upper Kobuk	Ambler, Kobuk, Shungnak	Not Active	
	Noatak/Kivalina	Noatak, Kivalina	Not Active	
	Northern Seward Peninsula	Buckland, Deering	Not Active	
Unit 26A	North Slope	Anaktuvuk Pass, Atkasuk, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, Utqiagvik, Wainwright	Active	

encies



In Memoriam

Charles F. Saccheus, Sr.



Charles F. Saccheus, Sr. passed away in early December 2024.

He was a long-serving member of the Working Group representing the communities of Elim, Golovin, and White Mountain. NPS biologist Kyle Joly remembers Charles as someone who “freely shared his deep knowledge of the region, subsistence practices, and caribou” for which Joly “is thoroughly indebted.”

Charles sat on the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, the Elim IRA Council, the Elim Native Corporation Board, and the Elim City Council and spent 16 years in the National Guard – Eskimo Scouts and Ears of the North.

According to retired ADF&G biologist Jim Dau, Charles “was someone who didn’t say much and never spoke loudly but when he talked, people listened.”

Alzred Steve Sitchagrauq Oomittuk

The Working Group was saddened by the news of member Steve Oomittuk’s passing just a few short days after the December 2024 meeting.

Steve was a tireless advocate for subsistence and the people of Tikigak. In addition to advocating for the protection of the Western Arctic Herd, he also served on the North Slope Subsistence Council for nearly a decade. Steve served as the mayor of Point Hope, mayor and vice president of the tribal council, and was a member of the North Slope Borough Assembly.

As a bearer of Iñupiaq culture, Steve’s legacy will live on not only in his carvings, but in the traditional dances he helped revive, in the ulus and harpoons created by the students he taught, and in the countless other ways he shared the history and traditions of his people.



Image courtesy of KTUU

Enoch Mitchell



© Brian Adams

The Working Group would like to pay tribute to Enoch L. Mitchell of Noatak, AK, who passed away in 2023. Mr. Mitchell represented Noatak and Kivalina on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group from 2016 until the time of his passing. He spoke passionately of his community’s reliance on their local foods, particularly caribou, and the impact felt when caribou were not around. His emotion when explaining important traditions (sharing a young hunter’s first catch) helped others understand how much caribou management matters to local people.

Enoch filled many roles within his community, showing how much serving his people meant to him. In addition to being a member of this group, Mr. Mitchell also served on the Noatak/ Kivalina State Fish & Game Advisory Committee, Northwest Arctic Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, Cape Krusenstern and Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commissions, Northwest Arctic Borough Subsistence Mapping project team, Noatak Fire Department, Noatak Search and Rescue, and as Noatak Tribal Administrator and Noatak Tribal Council President.

Enoch is survived by his wife Violet and their 5 children and 20 grandchildren.

Jim Magdanz

James S. Nukatpiaq Magdanz passed away in November 2024. From 1981-2012, Jim was a researcher with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game’s Subsistence division. He lived in Shungnak, Nome, and then Kotzebue, and worked in many communities within the Northwest Arctic, Seward Peninsula, and Kuskokwim River regions. Jim earned his PhD at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2020, writing his thesis on contemporary hunter-gatherer economies in Alaska.

While Jim didn’t do a lot of work directly with the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, his research, with colleagues at Division of Subsistence, is fundamental to understanding subsistence harvests in the region. Jim’s published reports documented not only the harvest of caribou, but how wild foods are shared between households and communities. This type of understanding - knowing about traditional economies and how some harvesters provide for multiple families - is critical to coming up with management plans and regulations that work for the people who depend on the herd.

Jim leaves behind a huge legacy of research, with several dozen technical papers and journal articles to his name. His research and presentations to the Board of Game and Board of Fish changed regulations to better accommodate traditional subsistence practices, and he engaged in groundbreaking work on traditional trade of resources, food security, and social network analysis. Jim Magdanz will also be remembered as a photographer, pilot, father and friend who loved the people and places of Northwest Alaska.



Image courtesy of Magdanz family

Miscellany

Pollock Simon



Happy trails to Pollock Simon, Sr. who stepped down from the Working Group this past year.

Pollock is an esteemed elder from the Koyukon Athabascan village of Allakaket, where he raised three children with his wife, Julia. Pollock was born in 1939 to Lee and Sarah Simon and has spent his life hunting, fishing, and trapping in the Koyukuk River Region. Throughout the decades, Pollock has been on multiple Councils, Committees, and Commissions. He continues to serve on the Federal Subsistence Western Interior Regional Advisory Council and the Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission. He was a long-time member of the State of Alaska Koyukuk River Advisory Committee, and the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association in addition to being a member of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. Both retired ADF&G biologist Jim Dau and Jack Reakoff of Wiseman describe Pollock as soft-spoken but a highly respected voice advocating for the healthy management of Alaska’s fish and wildlife resources.

The Working Group sends its best wishes and gives heartfelt thanks to Pollock for his many years of service.

Caribou Crossword Puzzle

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answers from page 11

Bull or Cow?

This pocket guide showing how to distinguish between bull and cow caribou in the field is available To view the guide, scan the QR code, visit adfg.alaska.gov, or pick up a printed guide at your local ADF&G office.

Bull or Cow?

How to distinguish between bull and cow caribou in the field

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation, 2017

Outreach & Education

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9

Sharing Caribou Knowledge

Caribou Migration Game - Napaaqtuġmiut School



The 5th and 6th graders at Napaaqtuġmiut School in Noatak did a study of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd during the 2024-2025 school year. Among other things, students learned about herd migration patterns. Teacher Roxi Wolfe was excited to see students make connections between what they learned in the classroom and what they have noticed in their environment from personal experience. Explaining migration patterns helped students understand why hunting on the Noatak River happens during the fall and spring, and students were completely able to relate to caribou going into the mountains to escape flies and mosquitoes in the summer. Students also discussed changes in herd size, possible causes for those fluctuations, the impact caribou have on the Iñupiaq people, and the role caribou play in the food web.

The unit on caribou culminated with the creation of a caribou migration game demonstrating some of the many variables that impact caribou throughout the year. Students started with a map of the region containing the areas caribou travel through during each season. Areas were color-coded and the many villages and rivers throughout the region were included on the map. Wright noted how much fun it was to hear the kids talk about family members who live in other villages and the places they have visited. Once the map was completed, students created situation cards that were also color-coded by season applying what they had learned about the challenges, opportunities, or experiences caribou might have in a particular season. As Wright observed her students working on their games, it was apparent they understood what food caribou ate at different times of year and what predators the caribou might face because caribou move forward or backwards on the game boards depending on the availability of food and encounters with predators. The finishing touches on the student-created game boards were color-coded squares on the migration map corresponding with the situation cards players would draw during the game.

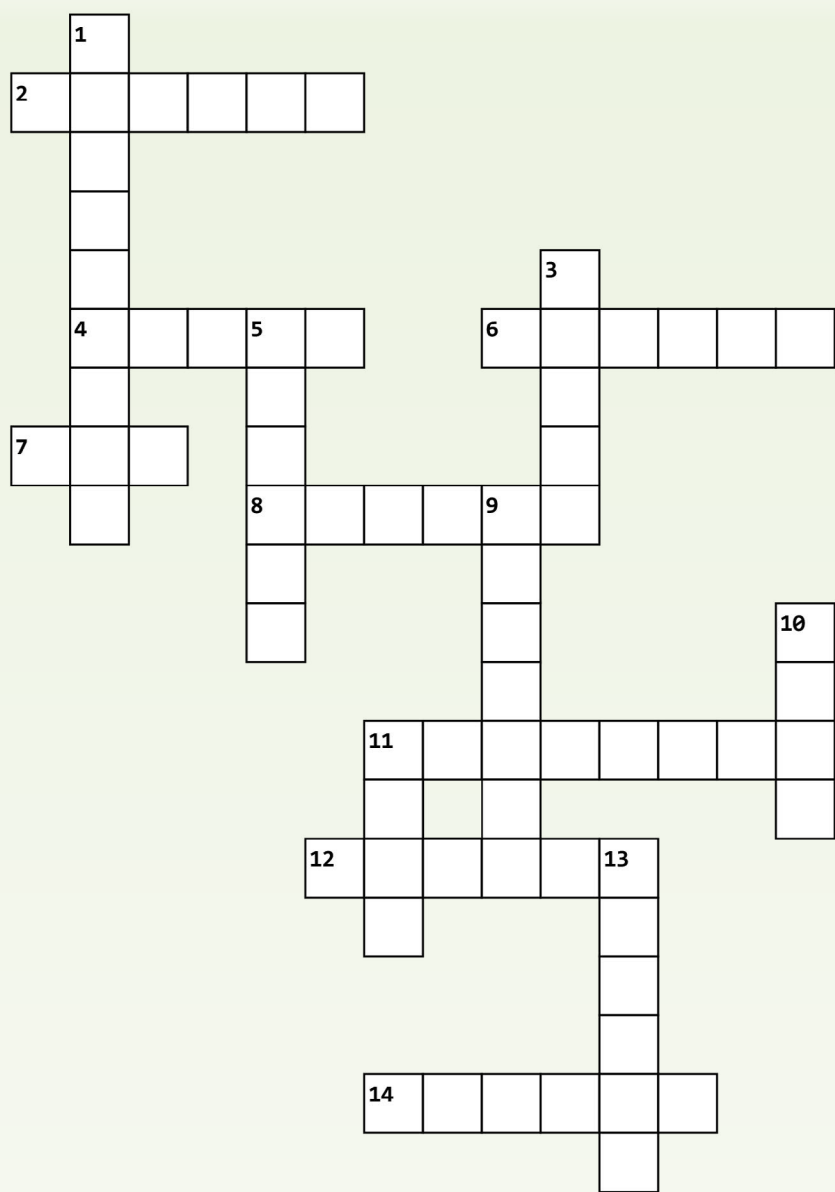
Once their games were finished, students played the migration game with their teams. Next, they introduced the games to their reading buddies in the 1st and 2nd grade class where teacher Ms. Kayla had also done a project about caribou migration providing students another way to share what they had learned.

Wolfe said this was a great hands-on project using cultural knowledge which helped students have a greater understanding and appreciation of the place in which they live. Students also learned from mistakes made in creating their migration games - many students went backwards over and over again because they only included the challenges faced by caribou on their game boards. Ultimately, this helped students realize how amazing caribou survival is despite the challenges - a great life lesson.

All images courtesy of Roxi Wolfe

Caribou Kid’s Corner

Caribou Crossword Puzzle (Answers on page 9)



- Across
2. Favorite winter food for caribou

4. Iñupiaq word for caribou

6. Caribou feet

7. Female caribou

8. Village where students created migration game

11. Animal who eats other animals

12. Name for counting caribou

14. Soft, fuzzy antler covering
- Down
1. Long distance seasonal travel

3. River WAH caribou often cross in fall

5. Number of seats on WACH Working Group

9. Male and female caribou both have these

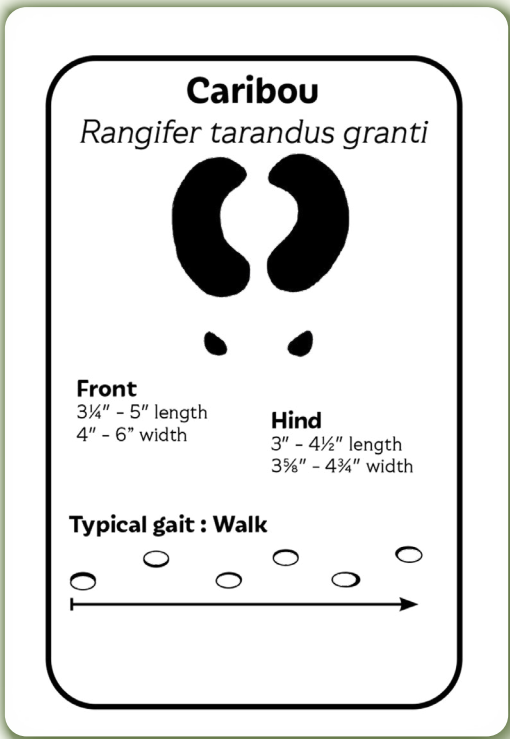
8. Village where students created a migration game

10. Group of caribou

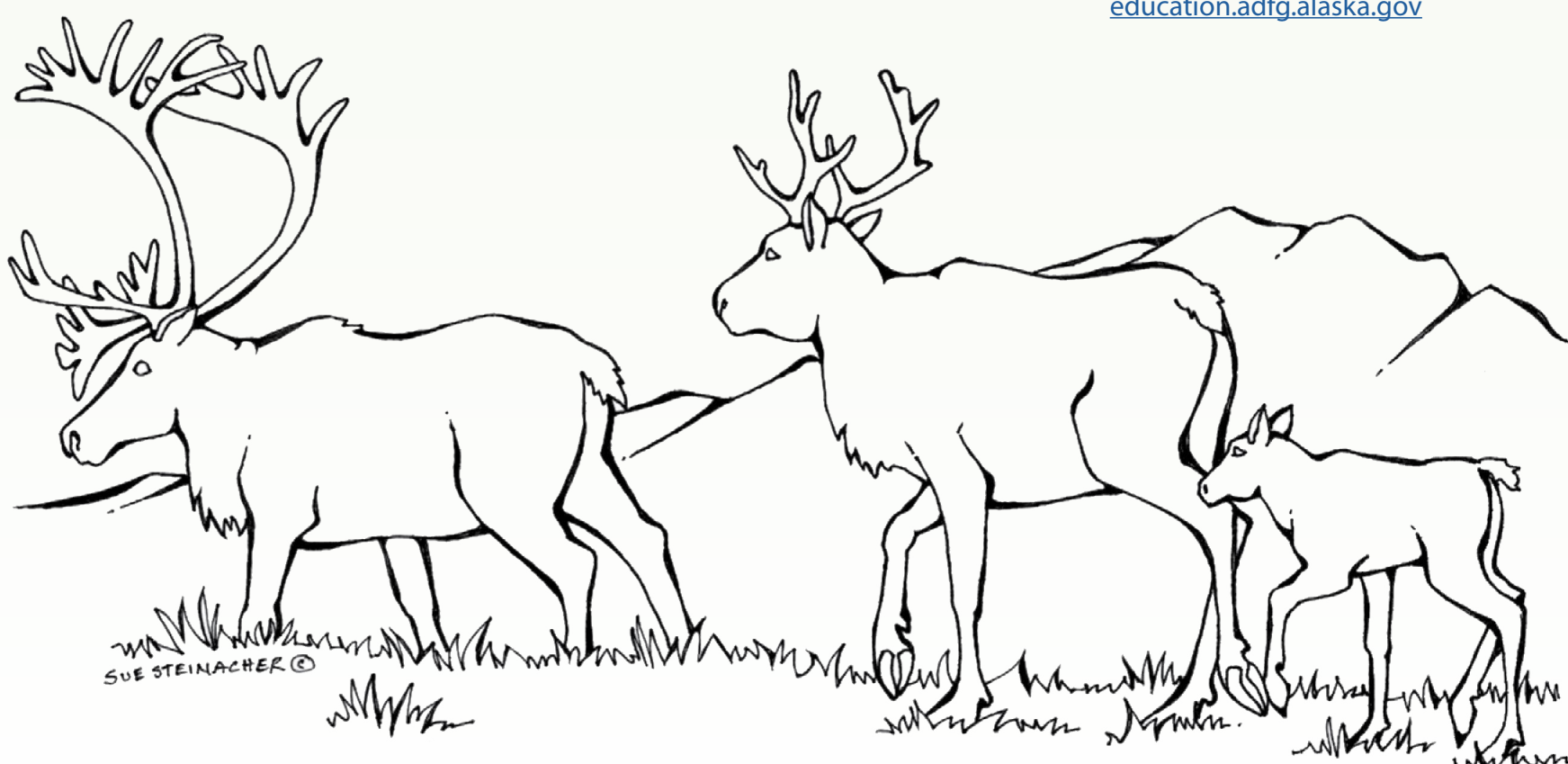
11. Animal hunted by other animals

13. Caribou part with name of tool for digging

Color the
TUTTUT



Learn more about caribou and other tracks with the newly published Tracks of Alaska Animals at education.adfg.alaska.gov



Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group



Front Row L-R: Vida Coaltrain, Michael Stickman, John Wisniewski, Bill Bernhardt, Tom Gray, Johnson Eningowuk, Steve Oomittuk, Back Row L-R: Vern Cleveland, Tim Fullman, Joseph Leavitt, Neil DeWitt, Justin Horton, Charlie Lean, Morris Nassuk, Morris Nakaruk, Cyrus Harris

About the Working Group

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group is made up of members who represent those with an interest in this herd. Members include subsistence users from communities in the range of the herd, other Alaskan hunters, guides, transporters, conservationists, and the reindeer herding industry. Management agencies participate in meetings and support the group but are not voting members.

If you have questions, concerns, or you would like to get involved, contact your local Working Group representative or one of the agencies. See pages 6-7 for more information.

WACH WG Voting Chairs

- Anchorage Fish & Game Advisory Committee
- Buckland, Deering, Selawik
- Anaktuvuk Pass & Nuiqsut
- Elim, Golovin, White Mountain
- Fairbanks Hunters
- Hunting Guides
- Kivalina & Noatak
- Kotzebue
- Koyukuk River (Huslia, Hughes, Allakaket, Bettles, Wiseman)
- Lower Kobuk River (Noorvik & Kiana)
- Middle Yukon River (Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, Kaltag)
- Point Hope & Point Lay
- Nome
- Conservationists
- N. Seward Peninsula (Teller, Brevig, Wales, Shishmaref)
- Reindeer Herders Association
- S. Seward Peninsula (Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, Stebbins, St. Michael, Kotlik)
- Transporters
- Upper Kobuk River (Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk)
- Atqasuk, Utqiagvik & Wainwright

Representatives

- vacant*
- Vida Coaltrain
- vacant*
- vacant*
- John Wisniewski
- Justin Horton
- vacant*
- Cyrus Harris (Vice-Chair)
- Darrell Vent, Sr.
- Vern Cleveland Sr. (Chairman)
- Michael Stickman
- vacant*
- Charlie Lean
- Tim Fullman
- vacant*
- Tom Gray
- Morris Nassuk
- Brad Saalsaa
- Bill Bernhardt
- vacant*

Alternates

- Matt Moore
- Raymond Lee, Jr
- Mary Hugo
- Morris Nakaruk
- John Siegfried
- John (Thor) Stacey
- vacant*
- Thomas Baker
- Jack Reakoff
- vacant*
- Arnold Demoski
- Caroline Cannon
- Jacob Martin
- Alex Johnson
- Johnson Eningowuk
- Harry Karmun
- Leo Charles, Sr.
- Ben Child
- vacant*
- Joseph Leavitt

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- Facilitator, Holly Spoth-Torres**
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Please send questions regarding Caribou Trails to:

- Alaska Department of Fish & Game**
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