

MULCHATNA CARIBOU HERD

RC503

Open August 1 – September 20
with a bag limit of one bull.

Mulchatna caribou harvest opportunities remain open while herd managers watch the population. Hunters are asked to immediately report their harvest.

HERD STATUS

Managers of Mulchatna caribou understand that many residents in southwest and western Alaska rely on this herd for subsistence. While the herd is below the overall population objective of 30,000 to 80,000 caribou, 2020 surveys (see reverse) show good calf production and a sufficient bull to cow ratio. The herd composition is suitable to allow for the harvest of some bulls while sustaining herd growth. Balancing harvest opportunity with long-term herd health, managers have opened registration hunt RC503 with a shortened season and a bag limit of one bull.



Prior to 2019, Mulchatna caribou herd population estimates had hovered between 25,000 to 30,000 caribou and the herd was showing signs of growth. The July 2019 population estimate resulted in a considerable decline, totaling 13,500 caribou, well below the population objective. In response, ADF&G issued an emergency order to reduce the bag limit from two caribou to one caribou. Federal regulators followed suit reducing the bag limit to one bull and later, a closure to all caribou hunting on federal land. To prevent overharvest, ADF&G issued a second emergency order on January 31st to close RC503 for the remainder of the regulatory year.

SUSTAINING THE HERD

Growing the herd means more food for more families over time. Biologists are working toward this goal by studying factors that may be limiting the reproduction and survival of Mulchatna caribou. Research is currently underway to study calf mortality

in the herd's two primary calving grounds. A wolf removal program that has been in place since 2011 targets wolves near caribou calving areas. Researchers are looking at forage quantity and quality in the range. 70 cows and bulls have been radiocollared to track adult survival and an additional 60 GPS collars will be used

this fall. All of these efforts will expand biologists' understanding of the forces affecting the herd throughout the year.

Another essential component of herd management is hunter harvest. Managers count on hunters to immediately report their harvest (within five days if successful) in order to track the number of animals taken and prevent overharvest. The easiest way is to **report online at hunt.alaska.gov**. Other options are to call the Dillingham office at (907) 842-2334 or bring your harvest report card to any ADF&G office.



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For regulations, emergency orders and to report harvest, visit www.hunt.alaska.gov

STATUS OF THE HERD

POPULATION	PRODUCTION	COMPOSITION
 <p>In July 2020, biologists and pilots were able to locate groups of Mulchatna caribou throughout the range by tracking individual caribou fitted with radio collars. Photos were taken from a fixed-wing aircraft to get an accurate count. Similar to last year, the 2020 population estimate is 13,500 caribou. This is below the population objective of 30,000 to 80,000 caribou. ADF&G biologists are researching factors that may be causing the decline.</p>	<p>This spring, contracted pilots conducted surveys to determine the reproductive status of radiocollared adult cows. The flights covered much of the Mulchatna range focusing on known calving areas. Of the cows that were three years old or older, 77% were pregnant or with a calf in 2020. This is similar to pregnancy rates observed in Mulchatna cows over the previous five years.</p> 	 <p>Understanding the sex composition of a caribou herd is important for determining the level of harvest a herd can endure and still grow. The most recent herd composition survey from the fall of 2019 indicated that 35% of the adult caribou were bulls, meeting the management objective. Managers feel this is a high enough ratio to open a shortened season with a bag limit of one bull. Hunters can help prevent overharvest by reporting as soon as possible.</p>

IDENTIFYING BULLS AND COWS

The goal of restricting harvest to bulls is to provide a harvest opportunity to hunters while keeping cows alive to produce offspring, thereby allowing the population to recover over time. Both bulls and cows can have antlers. Look for other indicators to determine sex.

Observe caribou from different angles. The most reliable way to differentiate bulls from cows is by looking from behind. Look for the presence or absence of a dark vulva patch located below the anus. Be aware: the scrotum can sometimes be confused with udders.

✓ Shoot a bull.

Let cows live.



Not as many bulls are needed in a healthy population.



Cows produce calves. Their calves grow into adults and produce more calves.

