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Proposal 146

Position:

I am asking the board to hold off on making an allocation between the number of non-resident and resident hunters in hunt DC827 due to a lack of data and information regarding non-resident hunter participation. Currently population and harvest numbers are sustainable, this is a high quality hunt providing an opportunity at a large bull caribou.

Background:

Caribou in the DC827 are no longer in an IM status. This allows for more flexibility for the area biologist to adjust harvest objectives, currently this is a high quality caribou hunt with the opportunity to harvest large bulls.

Non-resident participation during the past five years has varied from 6-21%. The higher number occurred in the most recent reporting period. This higher number of non-resident participation also coincides with good to excellent economic conditions in the lower 48.

Resident hunters have limited options, somewhere around 3, to apply for caribou drawing hunts. Access to caribou in the DC ~~827~~ hunt area is difficult and expensive. Resident hunters have many options to hunt for caribou under general season and harvest ticket hunts. **Resident hunter participation in DC ~~827~~ is in the low 40% range.**

The spike in non-resident hunter participation is potentially an anomaly that coincides with good economic conditions in the lower 48 and nationally.

Conservation:

DC ~~827~~ provides 150 tags to hunt a caribou herd estimated to number 2-3000 animals. Harvest is steady around 50 caribou. Harvest rates are between 2-3%, bull:cow numbers are healthy with good numbers of large bulls in the herd. Caribou in DC ~~827~~ are not designated for IM, current low harvest rates are well within legal management objectives.

Status-Quo:

I am asking the Board of Game to maintain the current hunt structure in DC 847 because we do not know if capping the number of non-residents will result in more resident harvest. Residents participate at low numbers, capping non-residents will not change that behavior. Capping non-residents at low numbers will result in extremely low harvest rates and foregone hunting opportunity. While currently non-resident opportunity levels are reported in the 20% range, this is not unusual for ungulate populations in remote and expensive areas to access.

Status-quo is preferable to making an allocation change because capping non-residents will not make the area cheaper or easier to access. Capping non-resident hunters will result in lower harvest, less revenue for conservation and lost economy for guides and transporters.

Please make no change to allocation in DC 847, let's reassess harvest and opportunity patterns at the next Region III meeting. If the current trends continue and non-resident participation grows a change may be necessary. I don't think this will be the case. I think things will stabilize, harvest rates will stay low overall and resident hunters will continue to utilize less than half of the tags they draw. The fact is there are many easier and more efficient caribou hunting opportunities for residents to utilize. Capping non-resident use in DC 847 would make sense if other caribou herds were doing poorly and there was limited opportunity for Alaskans to provide wild meat for their families. The fact is that ADFG has done a great job of managing caribou and there is a multitude of other, more economic, caribou hunting opportunities for resident hunters.