



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Stosh Hoffman  
Chair  
Alaska Board of Game

DATE: November 11, 2020

THROUGH: Eddie Grasser  
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FROM: Ryan Scott  
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SUBJECT: Emergency Caribou  
Regulations Request

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This memorandum is to provide information and data for the board to consider while determining if emergency regulatory action is needed to increase the number of Fortymile caribou hunters by allowing Unit 13 caribou registration and community harvest hunters the opportunity to participate in RC867, the winter Fortymile caribou registration hunt. Currently all hunters that have not already harvested two caribou since July 1, 2020 can participate in the RC867 hunt, except for the above Unit 13 subsistence hunters, who have testified that hunting in Unit 13 is important for their subsistence pattern of use.

Following the Fortymile fall hunt (RC860), the department assessed the herd's nutritional condition before setting the harvest quota for the Fortymile winter hunt (RC867). Based on indices of poor nutritional condition and population models, the Fortymile caribou herd is likely declining due to reduced nutritional status caused by overgrazing of its range. To decrease the potential for additional long-term impacts to the habitat, the best management strategy is to quickly reduce the herd to a size that will allow their nutritional condition to improve.

After carefully monitoring herd nutritional status, natural mortality, and effects of increased harvest on the herd size, biologists concluded that the best management strategy to mitigate long-term impacts to the herd's forage from continued overgrazing is to continue to use harvest to reduce the herd size to allow the nutritional condition of the herd to improve enough to help slow or arrest the decline.

The board will need to determine if the current Fortymile caribou herd status is an emergency under 5 AAC 96.625 and if providing Fortymile caribou hunting opportunity to Unit 13 Nelchina caribou hunters results in any conflicts with customary and traditional (C&T) use findings, board findings, or amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS). The range of the Fortymile caribou herd is spread over an area both inside and outside the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area [NSA; described at 5 AAC 99.015(a)(4)]. There is a positive C&T finding for the Fortymile herd in Units 12, 20D, 20E, and 25C outside the Fairbanks NSA. The board has found that 350-400 Fortymile caribou are reasonably necessary for subsistence uses. There is also a positive C&T finding for Nelchina caribou in Units 12 and 13, with an ANS of 600-1,000.

Currently, households that participate in hunts RC561, RC562, and CC001 are prohibited by regulation from hunting in caribou and moose hunts outside of Unit 13. However, CC001 hunters can hunt outside Unit 13 after the close of the regular season (April 1). After lengthy careful consideration the board adopted findings that showed Unit 13 subsistence hunters commonly hunted only in Unit 13 and tended not to travel around the state to experience a wide variety of hunting opportunities, as an example of subsistence efficiency [#2011-184-BOG (Tier I pattern) and #2006-170-BOG (Community pattern)]. The board chose to require hunters to follow these aspects of customary and traditional use patterns to obtain a subsistence registration permit for hunting caribou in Unit 13. Hunters who choose not to agree to follow the Unit 13 customary and traditional use patterns in the Tier I or community hunt may apply for a drawing permit, or may hunt in one of the numerous drawing, registration, or harvest ticket hunts for other herds in the State of Alaska, the majority of which also have a one-caribou or even one-bull bag limit.

## **Fall 2020 Harvest Information**

### **Fall Fortymile Caribou Information** (as of 11/6/2020) (RC 860)

Total permits issued:	17,843
Permits hunted:	11,619
Hunter Success:	46.8%
Total reported harvest:	5,441

### **Fall Nelchina Caribou Harvest**

(YC495, DC485, DC475, CC001, RC561, RC562)

Total permits issued:	9,948
Permits hunted:	Ongoing
Hunter Success:	25% (hunts ongoing)
Total reported harvest:	2,483

## **Winter Caribou Season Strategies and Harvest**

### **Fortymile Caribou: RC867 Strategy**

The winter Fortymile harvest quota is 5,000 caribou, including 3,000 in Zone 1 and 2,000 in Zone 3. Harvest in Zones 2 and 4 will be applied to the overall winter quota and these zones may remain open until the end of the season. Zone quotas may be adjusted to help extend season length. This winter's harvest quota is in addition to the fall harvest quota of 5,000. There is a bag limit of two caribou.

The federal subsistence hunt was opened to federally qualified subsistence hunters on federal public lands beginning on October 27<sup>th</sup>, also with a bag limit of two caribou.

Fortymile caribou harvest during this joint State–Federal RC867 winter hunt lasts from October 27 through March 31, unless the harvest quota throughout the entire hunt area is met before the closing date. We believe that Fortymile caribou harvest will be most affected by caribou location and weather during this 164-day hunt. Past data show that harvest is high only when caribou are easily accessible, and weather and snow conditions allow good access. As the Fortymile herd traverses its range between the White Mountains in Alaska and Yukon Territory, Canada, it crosses or congregates along the Steese, Taylor, and Top Of The World highways, sometimes crossing all 3 roadways multiple times during the winter hunt and can spend several weeks or months accessible from one or more of these highways. Hunters obtain permits and participate in the hunt accordingly, and harvest reflects these conditions. Because few DC485 permittees hunted Fortymile caribou in fall 2020, we expect participation by Nelchina hunters to be similarly low during the RC867 winter hunt.

There is also a winter Fortymile caribou season in Yukon Territory, Canada. This hunt occurred for the first time last winter. Harvest is expected to be low.

### RC867 Harvest (as of 11/6/2020)

Total permits issued: 2,059  
 Permits hunted: Ongoing  
 Hunter Success: Ongoing  
 Total reported harvest: 165

### Nelchina Caribou Unit 13 Hunt Strategy

The Unit 13 Nelchina caribou herd (NCH) hunt quota is an additional 1,100 caribou, which would need to be harvested to reach the desired harvest for regulatory year (RY) 20. Depending on the accessibility of the caribou, the quota could be filled quickly, putting the herd into the desired population objective; 331 animals have already been harvested (see below).

Hunt	Winter Quota
CC001	200
DC485	200
RC561/562	700
Total	1,100

### Winter NCH Reported Harvest to Date (11/6/2020)

	Bulls	Cows	Unknown	Total	Remaining Quota
DC485	61	44		105	91
CC001	7	5		12	182
RC561	36	38		74	478
RC562	79	61		140	
Federal	0	0		0	
	183	148	0	331	

### Current Fortymile Caribou Herd Hunt Regulations

#### RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit only; up to 30 total permits may be issued; or Aug. 1 - Aug. 21

Up to 3 caribou by registration permit only; or Aug. 1 - Sept. 30  
 Oct. 21 - Mar. 31

1 caribou by registration permit only, during a season for up to three days that may be announced by emergency order within a portion of the area during the period Oct. 20 - Nov. 30; or (Season to be announced by emergency order)

1 caribou by targeted permit only, during a season that may be (Season to be announced by emergency order)

announced by emergency order within a portion of the area during Dec. 1 - Mar. 31

**NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:**

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit only; up to 30 total permits may be issued; or

Aug. 1 - Aug. 21

1 bull by registration permit only

Aug. 10 - Sept. 30

**Fortymile and Nelchina Hunt Management and Harvest Assessment Considerations**

Unit 13 permits have been issued and changing permit conditions after the start of the season will create confusion with the public. The Unit 13 caribou hunt management strategy is complex but has worked well over the last two years. Hunters know what to expect and have largely endorsed the current permit conditions. Determining which participants in the community hunt followed, or attempted to follow, the pattern of use as described by the board may be difficult if opportunity is extended outside the traditional hunt area, due to the data analysis of the required questionnaires.

The request identifies hunters who have filled their bag limit as being qualified to participate in the Fortymile hunt. The department encourages continued harvest of Unit 13 caribou. However, limiting opportunity to only those hunters who have filled their bag limit is a unique allocative proposal and the board will need to determine if differentiating between hunters in this manner is appropriate.

There are concerns with additional hunters in Fortymile country. While this will likely be less of an issue during winter months, there are ongoing complaints of hunter crowding and land damage from the fall hunt.

**Department Recommendation**

The department is **NEUTRAL** on the allocation of Fortymile caribou. The current hunt management strategy for Fortymile caribou has performed well, and, as evidenced by previous proposals and Agenda Change Requests, if a need for change is necessary the department has been quick to bring proposals to the board for action. Hunters appear to understand and accept current Unit 13 permit conditions. The impact of adding additional hunters to the Fortymile caribou hunt is unknown because it is difficult to assess the number of hunters who would be eligible, and how many hunters would take advantage of the opportunity. If adopted, regulatory changes would be considered emergency regulations and would expire in 120 days and Unit 13 hunt conditions would return to their codified status in regulatory year 2021.