

PROPOSAL 22

5 AAC 99.025. Customary and traditional uses of game populations.

Determine customary and traditional uses of the Nushagak Peninsula caribou herd in Game Management Units 17A and 17C – Nushagak Peninsula, Bristol Bay.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Under AS 16.05.258, the Board of Game (board) is required to identify game populations, or portions of populations, that are customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence. Under 5 AAC 99.025, in 1988, the board made a positive customary and traditional use (C&T) finding for caribou in Units 9A, 9B, 17, and 18, with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) of 2,100– 2,400 caribou. Generally, the Board of Game makes C&T findings for specific caribou herds. In early 1988, most caribou taken in Unit 17 were from the Mulchatna caribou herd (MCH). Therefore, the information provided to the board in support of the positive C&T determination generally addressed uses specific to the MCH. Since 1988, however, two distinct caribou populations have been present in Unit 17: the MCH and the Nushagak Peninsula caribou herd (NPCH). A customary and traditional use finding specific to the NPCH herd has not been made. The department is proposing the board make a C&T determination specifically for the NPCH.

Following the C&T determination for caribou in Unit 17, caribou were reintroduced to the Nushagak Peninsula to provide additional caribou hunting opportunities. The NPCH primarily occupies the approximately 425 square mile Nushagak Peninsula, which is the portion of Units 17A and 17C south of the Igushik River, the Tuklung River, and the Tuklung Hills, and west to Tvativak Bay. Prior to 2016, caribou hunting on the Nushagak Peninsula was limited to federally-qualified subsistence users under permit FC1702. In 2016, an area within the Nushagak Peninsula was opened to hunters using the state RC501 permit to increase harvest and lower the population of the Nushagak Peninsula herd, which had exceeded population objectives. With a reported harvest of 378 caribou during the 2016–2017 season, and 100 caribou during the 2017–2018 season, the population estimate declined from 1,294 in 2016 to 822 in 2019. The NPCH is now closer to the optimum level of 750.

The Department of Fish and Game (department) will prepare a report with information relevant to the eight criteria (5 AAC 99.010) that the board uses to identify game populations with customary and traditional uses, to assist the board with this finding.

If the board chooses to make a positive C&T finding for the Nushagak Peninsula caribou herd, the department will also provide options for the board to consider establishing an ANS.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-034)
