

**Caribou Information by provided by ADFG/DWC**  
**Requested by Member Barrette**  
**03/22/2023**

**Galena Mountain Caribou Herd**

The GMH has been stable between 110-125 animals for the last 10 years. They usually spend the winter west of Galena Mtn and typically calve east of Galena Mtn. All hunting has been closed since 2004 due to observed population declines. They are monitored cooperative with FWS throughout the year and we have 7 active VHF collars on adult females to help locate the herd. Predation is likely the limiting factor; however, there have not been studies to determine cause-specific mortality.

**Denali Caribou Herd**

2019 estimate of 3,060. Trend appears stable.

**Mentasta Caribou Herd**

NPS develops population estimates for the Mentasta herd annually, but the herd has been relatively stable ~300-600 animals since 2005.

State hunting opportunities for Mentasta caribou have been closed since 1989. Federal subsistence hunting has been closed since 1992. A new federal subsistence hunt for caribou in Unit 11 was recently created and is a TBA hunt administered by NPS with the intention of targeting Nelchina animals when Mentasta animals are not in the area. This is the first year they could have opened that hunt, and they do not intend to open it. There is a federal subsistence hunt in Unit 12 on Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge that intends to target Nelchina animals when Mentasta animals are not in the area, but it is possible that some Mentasta harvest could unintentionally occur in that hunt. This herd seems to have been bottlenecked by predation because of the federal land status. The population has hovered around 400 animals for years. We have received requests to conduct predator control but are unable due to federal land status. Trapping effort in this area is extremely low due to the remoteness.

Research conducted from 1987 to 1990 on Mentasta productivity and survival indicated the population at that time was limited by low recruitment, with the suggestion that calf mortality was most likely attributed to high rates of predation (Lieb *et al.* 1994). Additional recruitment studies conducted between 1990 and 1997 supported the hypothesis that Mentasta population growth was being limited by calf mortality, largely due to predation (Jenkins and Barten 2005). Jenkins and Barten postulated that the herd would continue to decline until a low-density dynamic equilibrium was reached which would then be modulated by fluctuations in predator densities. That appears to be what has happened, and we have no reason to believe there are any other factors contributing to the low numbers that persist in the Mentasta herd.

Table 1. Fall population estimates for the Mentasta caribou herd. Population estimate was derived using the June post-calving census and fall sex and age composition count.

Year	Est June Cows	Est Fall Calves	Estimated Fall bulls	Fall Population Estimate
2017	263	47	79	389
2018	323	51	96	470
2019	302	77	100	479
2020	590	106	454	1150
2021	350	49	273	672

\*Highlighted likely includes *Nelchina caribou*