

Note: This proposal is also scheduled for the January 26-29, 2024 Western Arctic / Western Region meeting in Kotzebue, Alaska as Proposal 2, during which Units 22, 23 and 26A will be considered. The board may defer final action on all Units to the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting.

PROPOSAL 139

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Reduce the bag limit for taking caribou in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D and 26A to four caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow as follows:

RESIDENT HUNTERS: Four caribou [FIVE CARIBOU PER DAY] per year, however, no more than 1 cow may be taken.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Data from biologists at the ADF&G illustrate that there has been continued decline in the Western Arctic caribou herd (WACH). The July 2022 photo census estimated 164,000 caribou in the Western Arctic caribou herd which is down from 188,000 in 2021. Census numbers for past years: 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. In the two years between the 2019 and 2021 census, the herd declined nearly 12% per year. Additionally, data shows that the cow survival rate is at 71% in 2021, well below the herd's average of 81% (1981-2020). ADF&G presented this information to the WACH Working Group in December 2022.

At its annual meeting the WACH Working Group assigned the management level “Preservative, Declining” to the herd based on the current census (within the range of 130,000-200,000) and adult cow survival rate less than 80%.

In doing so, the WACH Working Group sees the immediate need to address the current herd decline by limiting the harvest of both bulls and cows to allow the herd population to begin to recover.

In the units identified above, the current bag limit is set at five caribou per person per day during the open periods for bulls and cows. The WACH WG proposes to change regulations to four caribou per person per year, with no more than one cow allowed.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Vern Cleveland, Chair (EG-F23-208)
