

Note: This proposal is also scheduled for the March 15 – 22, 2024 Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska as Proposal 140. Units 22, 23, and 26A will be considered at the Western Arctic / Western Region meeting. The board may defer final action on all Units to the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting.

PROPOSAL 3

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

Close nonresident caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A as follows:

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd working group (WACH WG) proposes to close caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A to non-Alaska residents.

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: No open season [1 BULL].

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Data from biologists at 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 WG 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 WG sees the immediate need to address the current herd decline by limiting caribou harvest to allow the herd population to begin to recover.

In a separate proposal, the WACH WG proposes a reduction in harvest for resident hunters. The working group feels that if harvest reductions are placed on Alaskans to allow the herd to recover, there should also be harvest reductions for non-resident hunters.

Currently, in the game management units identified above, nonresident hunters are allowed to harvest one (1) bull per year. The WACH WG proposes to close caribou hunting in Units 21D Remainder, 22, 23, 24B Remainder, 24C, 24D, and 26A to nonresidents.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Vern Cleveland, Chair (EG-F23-209)
