

PROPOSAL 1

5 AAC 92.111. Intensive Management Plans, Mulchatna Caribou Herd Predation Management Area.

Modify the Mulchatna Caribou Herd Predation Management Area to allow for the take of brown and black bears by department staff to benefit the herd as follows:

Allow black and brown bears to be removed by department staff as part of the intensive management plan for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH).

WHAT IS THE ISSUE YOU WOULD LIKE THE BOARD TO ADDRESS AND WHY?

The previously adopted black and brown bear portion of the intensive management (IM) program for the MCH was vacated by the Alaska Superior Court in March 2025. The department will provide the board information to address the Court's rulings, specifically with data and information to understand the status of the program and the critical need to continue the program. This information will provide the board with the necessary information to assess the sustainability of the area's brown bear population.

The MCH has been identified by the Board of Game (board) under Alaska's Intensive Management Statute as important for providing high levels of harvest for human consumptive use and established a population objective of 30,000–80,000 caribou and a harvest objective of 2,400–8,000 for the herd. There is a positive customary and traditional use finding for the MCH, with an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence use of 2,100–2,400 caribou.

Due to low caribou abundance, all MCH hunts (state and federal) have been closed since 2021. To increase the overall abundance of the MCH, the department has issued permits to the public to take wolves same-day-airborne and shoot wolves from the air since 2011. Bear predation has been identified as a significant factor in MCH calf survival. In 2022 the board added black and brown bear control by the department as an available tool to grow the herd. In the spring of 2023, following further declines in the MCH and in addition to the public wolf control program, the department-initiated bear and wolf removal efforts on the western MCH calving grounds, which is a small portion (1.8%) of the herd's range.

The MCH IM program aims to reduce large predator populations in a small defined area for a short period, enhancing caribou calf survival, and increasing herd abundance. Bear control is conducted in the spring when the caribou herd has congregated to calve, and wolf control occurs pre-calving. Department-led efforts since 2023 have significantly improved calf:cow ratios. Continuing predator control is essential for herd recovery, and halting these efforts would undermine gains made since 2023.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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