

Proposal 10

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

Reduce the bag limit for caribou in Units 22, 23, and the southwest portion of 26A for resident hunters to four bull caribou and no cows for all open and ‘to be announced’ seasons as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Reduce the bag limit for caribou in Units 22, 23, and the southwest portion of 26A for resident hunters from 15 caribou, one of which may be a cow to four bull caribou and no cows for all open and ‘to be announced’ seasons.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Reduce the caribou bag limit for residents in Game Management Unit 22, 23, and the southwest portion of 26A to 4 bulls, eliminating cow harvest to assist in reversing the downward population trend of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH).

The Northwest Arctic Council believes that this reduction will help conserve the WACH for future generations as cows are vital to the ability of the WACH to rebuild. The continued population decline of the WACH highlights the urgent need to implement sustainable practices so that the population may begin to recover, and human harvest is the one controllable factor.

While these measures may be challenging in the short term, they will benefit subsistence users in the long term – and this reduction in bag limits are not intended to be a permanent change; if everyone works together and acts responsibly, the reduction in bag limits and allowable animals could be lifted once the herd rebounds. History shows that recovery is possible—the caribou population rebounded from 75,000 in the 1970s—and with collective action, it can happen again. Given the current rate of decline, the Council is concerned that there could only be a few years remaining to hunting at the current level. This threatens our identity as caribou people. Ultimately, while these changes may be difficult now, they are a necessary investment for long-term conservation of the WACH as well as the well-being of future generations. There is currently a special action request submitted to the Federal Subsistence Board requesting a similar change in bag limits but would still allow one cow. The Northwest Arctic Council supported that request with the modification to remove the language that would allow the take of cows. The Federal Subsistence Board will act on that proposal after this proposal is due, but before the Board of Game meets on this proposal.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

No. The Council did hear others were putting in similar proposals, but the Council did not work in conjuncture with anyone, although the proposal was drafted after ADF&G staff reports on the herd status and other information at the winter 2026 Northwest Arctic Council meeting.

PROPOSED BY: Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (OI-F26-132)
