

Proposal 129

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

Establish a Tier II hunt for the Fortymile caribou herd as follows:

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

Add a Tier II Subsistence hunting permit hunt for the Fortymile caribou herd (FCH) in Units 12, 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C) outside of the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Use Area. The number of permits available, seasons, and bag limits will need to be determined by the Board of Game (board).

Units and Bag Limits	Resident	Nonresident
	Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Open Season

(15)

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Units 20(B) and 20(F), those portions south of the Yukon River, and north and east of a line formed by the Richardson Highway from the Unit 20(D) boundary to its intersection with the Steese Highway, north along the Steese Highway to its intersection with the Elliot Highway, then northwest along the Elliot Highway to its intersection with the Dalton Highway, then north along the Dalton Highway to the Yukon River, and Unit 20(D) that portion north of the south bank of the Tanana River

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit; up to 30 total permits may be issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

Up to 3 caribou by registration permit only; or

Aug. 1—Sept. 30
Oct. 21—Mar. 31

1 caribou by targeted permit only, during a season that may be announced by emergency order within a portion of the area during Dec. 1 - Mar. 31

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit only; up to 30 total permits may be issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

1 bull by registration permit only

Aug. 10—Sept. 30

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Unit 20(E)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter, by youth hunt drawing permit only; up to 30 total permits may be issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

Up to 3 caribou by registration permit only; or

Aug. 1—Sept. 30
Oct. 21—Mar. 31

1 caribou by registration permit only, during a season for up to three days that may be announced by emergency order within a portion of the area during the period Oct. 20 - Nov. 30; or

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

1 caribou by targeted permit only, during a season that may be announced by emergency order

(Season to be announced by emergency order)

within a portion of the area during
Dec. 1 - Mar. 31

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime
of a hunter, by youth hunt
drawing permit only; up to
30 total permits may be issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

1 bull by registration permit only

Aug. 10—Sept. 30

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(20)

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Unit 25(C)

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a
hunter, by youth hunt drawing
permit only; up to 30 total permits
may be issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

Up to 3 caribou by registration
permit only; or

Aug. 1—Sept. 30
Oct. 21—Mar. 31

1 caribou by targeted
permit only, during a season
that may be announced by
emergency order within a
portion of the area during
Dec. 1 - Mar. 31

(Season to be
announced by
emergency order)

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

1 caribou, per lifetime of a hunter,
by youth hunt drawing permit only;
up to 30 total permits may be
issued; or

Aug. 1—Aug. 21

1 bull by registration permit
only

Aug. 10—Sept. 30

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

Establish a Tier II hunt in regulation for the Fortymile caribou herd in Units 12, 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C), outside the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (FNSA), as required by statute, in case a Tier II hunt is needed to further restrict the take of this game population to meet sustained yield and subsistence law mandates. The board made a positive customary and traditional use finding for the FCH in Units 12, 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C), outside the FNSA and determined an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses (ANS) of 350–400 caribou.

Following years of steady increase, the herd reached peak population size of 83,000 caribou in 2017, which was at or above the last peak observed in the early 1960s. The herd has now been declining over the past 9 years at an average of 14% per year. Lower parturition rates of 3-year-old cows, and reduced weights of newborn and four-month-old calves indicate the nutritional condition of the herd declined as the herd reached or exceeded the carrying capacity of the range. Lower annual survival and productivity, along with intentional reductions of the herd through an increase in harvest in 2020 and 2021 to lessen the impact to the range, resulted in a decline to 29,000 caribou by 2024 and a modeled estimate of 24,000–28,000 caribou in summer 2025. The department has not observed strong indication that productivity or annual survival have begun to improve, suggesting the herd is likely to continue to decline during the next several years.

The 2025 harvestable surplus was estimated at 480–560 bull caribou. However, if modeled estimates of decline continue, the population is projected to be 17,500 or fewer caribou at some point during 2028–2030. At this population level, harvestable surplus will drop below the lower bound of the ANS range and the board may wish to consider whether current regulations continue to provide reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses or whether replacing the current hunt structure with a Tier II hunt is necessary if harvestable surplus is unable to provide for all subsistence uses.

The current hunt structure was developed by the Fortymile Harvest Coalition and is outlined in the Fortymile Harvest Management Plan which has been reviewed and readopted by the board on a regular basis. It includes a fall and winter unlimited registration hunt in Units 20B, 20D, 20E, 20F, and 25C, with harvest quotas partitioned into zones to disperse hunting pressure and allow maximum hunting opportunity by various user groups and communities (Figure 1). A significant portion of the annual FCH range and harvest occurs in the FNSA in Units 20B, 25C, and 20D. Over the past 10 years, an average of 292 caribou were harvested annually from within the FNSA by resident hunters in the fall, representing 21% of the total annual fall harvest. Over the same time period, an average of 114 caribou were harvested annually from within the FNSA by residents during the winter hunt, representing 16% of the total annual winter harvest. Over the past 10 years, satellite linked collars on FCH have shown that 69% of the collar locations occur outside

the FNSA during the fall hunt period and 70% of the collar locations occur outside the FNSA during the winter hunt period.

The board may not authorize subsistence hunting in nonsubsistence areas. In these areas, the subsistence priority does not apply, which may complicate or limit regulatory options if a Tier II subsistence hunt is established, see again, Figure 1. Approximately 79% and 74% of the harvest in the fall and winter respectively occur outside of the FNSA. If the harvestable surplus is below the lower end of the ANS range, the state subsistence law states that opportunity shall be allocated according to Tier II criteria. If there is no Tier II regulation, then the department does not have the authority to distinguish among subsistence users and will be required to close all opportunity (all existing hunts including hunt areas outside the NSA) until the board can take action.

The board will need to determine appropriate seasons, bag limits, and the maximum number of Tier II subsistence permits that can be issued for the Tier II hunt.

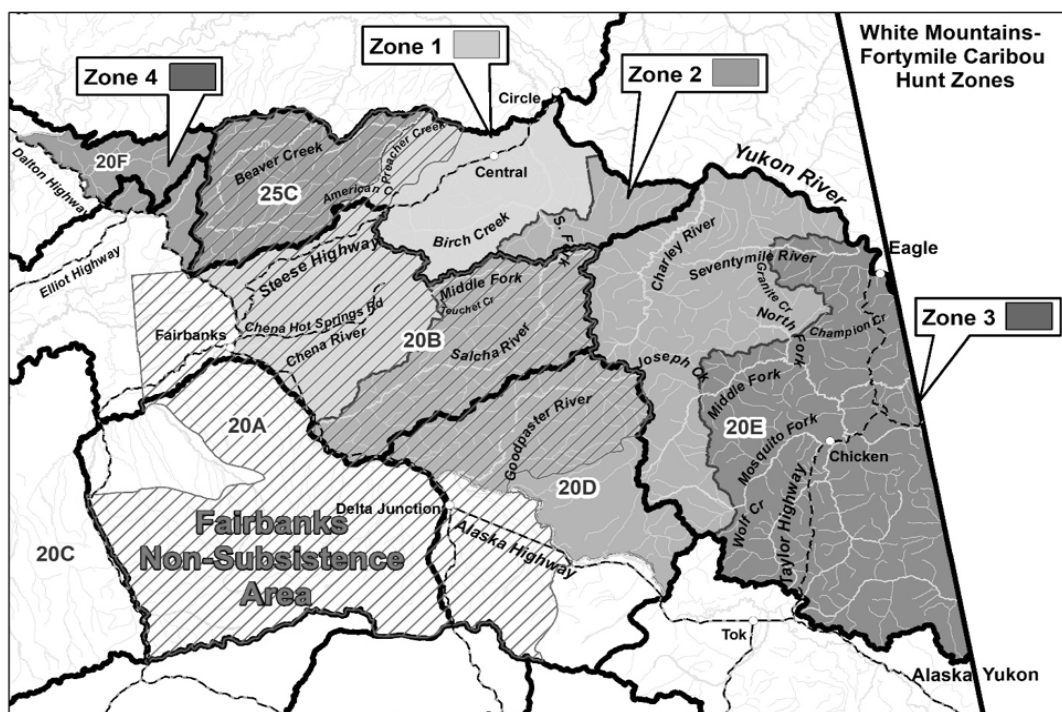


Figure 1. Fortymile caribou herd hunt zones and the Fairbanks Non-Subsistence Area. A color version can be found online at <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.proposalbook>

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F26-023)
