

Proposal 139

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

Redefine the boundaries of Zones 1 and 4 to isolate the core remote section of the current Zone 4 as follows:

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

Redefine the boundaries of Zones 1 and 4 to isolate the core remote section of the current Zone 4. By constricting Zone 4 to more remote areas of the Beaver Creek and Victoria Creek drainages, managers gain the flexibility to leave this zone open even when road-accessible quotas in Zone 1 are met or risk of overharvest exists. Given relatively low hunter effort and harvest rates, this proposal is unlikely to impact the sustainability of the herd, while providing significantly more predictable seasons and improved opportunities for remote hunters.

Additionally, this adjustment aligns the zone boundaries with the universal coding units used for departmental harvest reporting. This administrative alignment will improve the accuracy of harvest data and streamline the reporting process for both hunters and department staff.

Altered zone descriptions would read as follows:

Zone 1:

Unit 20B, that portion within the Chatanika River drainage north and east of the Steese Highway, those portions north and west of the Steese Highway, those portions north and east of the Elliot Highway and that portion south and east of the Steese Highway, excluding the Middle Fork of the Chena River drainage upstream from and including the Teuchet Creek drainage and excluding the Salcha River drainage.

Unit 20F, those portions north and west of the Steese Highway, north and east of the Elliot Highway to its intersection with the Dalton Highway, then east of the Dalton Highway and south of the Yukon River, excluding the Chatanika River drainage.

Unit 25C, excluding that portion within the drainage of the South Fork of Birch Creek, excluding that portion within the Yukon–Charley Rivers National Preserve, and excluding that portion of 25C within the Beaver Creek and Victoria Creek drainages between and including the Moose Creek drainage and Fossil Creek drainage.

Zone 4:

Unit 25C, that portion within the Beaver Creek and Victoria Creek drainages, between and including the Moose Creek drainage and Fossil Creek drainage.

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

The Fortymile Caribou Herd has declined in recent years, resulting in reduced harvest allocations. As these limits become more restrictive, precise management is required to provide adequate hunting opportunity without overshooting established quotas. The current shared quota

between Zone 1 and Zone 4 creates an avoidable management challenge and unnecessarily limits opportunity in remote areas. Zone 1 includes the Steese Highway corridor, where caribou can be highly accessible. As a result, harvest can increase quickly, raising the risk of exceeding the quota. To prevent this, managers often close both Zone 1 and Zone 4 at the same time because they are linked under the Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Plan. However, Zone 4 differs significantly from Zone 1; it is a remote area with limited access, strict vehicle restrictions, and low hunting pressure. Over the past five seasons, Zone 4 has accounted for an average of about 2% of total hunting effort and 1.8% of the harvest. Under the current hunt structure, hunters seeking a remote experience in Zone 4 may be affected by closures driven by high harvest levels or caribou presence along the road system in Zone 1. This reduces opportunity across the northern portion of the hunt area, even though harvest in Zone 4 poses little risk to the total harvest cap.

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

This proposal was developed by the Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Management Coalition, which includes representatives from Advisory Committees (Fortymile-Upper Tanana, Central, Fairbanks, Eagle, Delta, Anchorage, and Matanuska Valley) who represent hunters who have traditionally hunted the FCH. Development of the proposal also included consultation with state and federal agencies and other resource agencies. This proposal is part of an updated Fortymile Caribou Harvest Plan, which will be submitted to the Board.

PROPOSED BY: Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Management Coalition (OI-F26-201)
