Proposal 166

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

Reduce Caribou bag limit for Western Arctic Caribou herd in 24B and 24C remainder 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 4 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR IN 24B REMAINDER JULY 1 - OCT 1 - NOV 1-JUNE 30**

[FIVE CARIBOU PER DAY HOWEVER CALVES MAY NOT BE TAKEN, BULLS

JULY 1-OCT 14-&-FEB 1-JUNE 30, COWS JULY 15-APRIL 30]

BAG LIMIT 4 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR IN 24C REMAINDER

JULY 1 -OCT1 - NOV 1- JUNE 30

[FIVE CARIBOU PER DAY HOWEVER CALVES MAY NOT BE TAKEN, BULLS

JULY 1-OCT 14-&-FEB 1-JUNE 30, COWS JULY 15-APRIL 30]

These two GMU units 24B and 24C remainder are within the range of the Western Arctic Caribou herd predominantly. Regulation reduction should include these sub units of GMU 24.

The proposal focuses on best use of the limited bull caribou, eliminating cow harvest entirely. The season is set for Bull caribou when they are best to eat. Bulls start into the rut in early October, they become unusable for food while breeding. It is best reproductive management to not disrupt the breeding cows and bulls during the rut.

Bulls are very run down after the intense short breeding activity. The poor flavor is cleared out by November, they have used all fat as well as muscle protein they can be eaten in early November but not prime, but are typically regained most muscle by February 1.

Cows have increasing gestational demands in February. If winter conditions are severe cows will draw significant protein from muscle to support the fetus. Breakup timing is of critical importance for all caribou. When the temperatures warm up to above freezing normally in late April, the Cotton Grass Sedge Tussock shoots up the flower blossom high in protein. The shape of the tussock and open habitat allow it to be the first large protein source for caribou muscle loss and final fetal development. Deep snow and late spring timings are very detrimental to caribou if they don't have access to this resource.

Arctic Caribou will seek and eat predominantly Tussock flowers as they move towards calving and summer range. Like all grasses the tussock flower is pollinated by the wind. In early summer after the Tussock is pollinated they are switching to wildflowers. Woolly Lousewort, Dryas, Fireweed, and other flowers are important protein/ nectar for lactating cow caribou and Bulls growing and accumulating fat.

Early hot weather is extremely bad for caribou. The Tussock will pollinate too quickly, pollinating insects will be very active in the long days to pollinate the wildflowers in a short period of time.

Mosquitoes and parasitic fly harassment exacerbates the ability to gain fat and produce quality lactation. Cows will be thin in falls after a long hot summer, and calf weights will be below normal. These calve can become a weak cohort with these cows delayed reproduction until 4 years old.

Lichen is always eaten throughout the year by caribou to maintain the microbiome in their digestive system. Lichen intake is vastly reduced during spring and summer normally. Lichen intake will increase in summer if high protein feed is lost.

Bulls will not have as thick of fat in fall after a hot summer, especially after a late spring. Five year old bulls are skeletal mature and dominate breeding due to the larger fat reserves than younger growing bulls. The large bulls will be especially run down post rut after a hot summer. A good rule of thumb is; if caribou aggregate in summer to facilitate a survey they are in hardship at that time.

Cows are in lactation through the fall right before the rut. It is not best management to harvest cows in summer or fall when in lactation. The cow caribou are real skinny and meat is not of the same quality as in Early October and early winter.

If limited cow harvest can eventually be supported it should only be from early October to February. Bulls can be harvested most of the year except for during the rut, and just after the rut.

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

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd population has declined dramatically. The WACH work group is very concerned as I am with excessive cow caribou take is a main driver currently, weather events and predation are additive. I informed the Koyukuk River AC of my concerns to eliminate cow take with a uniform bull bag limit and seasons applied across the WACH Range. The data and social media shows that large numbers of cow harvest it is exceeding sustained yield.

Cow caribou almost never have twins. Cow caribou short yearling that experience hardships like hot summer as a calf, deep snow, rain icing in winter, and late spring will typically not produce its first calf until her fourth birthday. Currently large percentage of recruited cows have lost one year of production, affecting overall recruitment. This weak cohort with a 10 year life span would only have 6 calves at best. Strong cohorts with better conditions will produce at 3 years, or 7 total calves in her life span.

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

I have discussed these issues with the Koyukuk River AC members as I am chairman, Western Interior Regional Advisory Council and other Regions. I discuss caribou management with ADFG managers about what strategies to use to address the current situation with all the Northern Caribou herds. I discuss these issues with Federal management NPS, USFWS, and BLM as well as the Federal Subsistence Board. I talk about these caribou issues with people that travel up the Dalton Highway to hunt the Arctic hunt caribou.

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