Proposal 173

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

Reduce the bag limit for Carioubou in 24B reaminder as follows:

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

BAG LIMIT 5 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR IN 24A REMAINDER JULY 1 -OCT 1 - NOV 1-JUNE 30

[RESIDENTS TEN CARIBOU JULY 1-APRIL 30]

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?

I would like to address the caribou decline of all four Arctic caribou herds Western Arctic, Central, and Porcupine. Although Teshukpuk herd is stable but not significant in 24A.

GMU 24A remainder caribou can have all four herds present in winter, spring and fall. Western has been west out of this unit recently. Severe weather weakening of these populations, combined with cow harvest and predation.

Currently the Porcupine herd has declined 33% since 2017. Central Arctic herd has declined 61%, These two herds can not support cow harvest and large bag limits with road access.

There are bulls to harvest with a longer season to offset the necessary elimination of cow harvest.

Sustained yield conservation is paramount, as they are an important food resource for Alaskans subsistence use.

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

PROPOSED BY: Jack Reakoff (OI-F26-106)

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