

Proposal 179

5 AAC 85.025; 92.069. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou; Special provisions for moose and caribou drawing permit hunts.

Require nonresident caribou hunters that are not accompanied by a guide or a resident second degree of kindred to participate in a limited draw permit system as follows:

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

GMU 26B Nonresident Caribou Draw Permit System

Proposed Regulatory Action

Place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred ON A DRAW TAG ALLOCATION IN GMU 26B

Overview of the Proposal

This proposal would place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in Game Management Unit 26B on a limited draw permit system.

Nonresident caribou hunters using a registered guide, or accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in GMU 26B would still be on a harvest ticket permit structure.

Under this structure:

- **Up to 250 permits for non resident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred would be available annually**
- **Season dates: August 1 – September 15**
- **Bag limit: One bull caribou per permit holder**

This framework establishes a reasonable cap on total nonresident participation while still maintaining opportunity for nonresident hunters.

Proposal Justification

Increasing Nonresident Hunting Pressure

Harvest data used in this proposal was obtained from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and compares resident and nonresident hunting statistics within Unit 26B. ADFG staff were able to provide nonresident harvest and participation data for the full fifteen-year period from 2010–2025. However, resident harvest data for 2025 was not yet finalized at the time this proposal was written because the spring season was still ongoing. According to ADFG staff, preliminary 2025 resident data is tracking similarly to 2024 levels. Therefore, statistical

comparisons in this proposal use nonresident data from 2010–2025 and resident data from 2010–2024.

Based on preliminary data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, nonresident hunting pressure in Unit 26B has steadily increased in recent years. Since 2021, nonresident hunters have accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total hunting pressure in the unit.

Nonresident Share of Total Hunting Pressure – GMU 26B

Year	Percent of Total Hunting Pressure (Nonresident)
-------------	--

2010	20.75%
------	--------

2011	16.96%
------	--------

2012	19.94%
------	--------

2013	29.78%
------	--------

GMU 26B Nonresident Caribou Draw Permit System

Proposed Regulatory Action

Place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred ON A DRAW TAG ALLOCATION IN GMU 26B

Overview of the Proposal

This proposal would place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in Game Management Unit 26B on a limited draw permit system.

Nonresident caribou hunters using a registered guide, or accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in GMU 26B would still be on a harvest ticket permit structure.

Under this structure:

- **Up to 250 permits for non resident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred would be available annually**
- **Season dates: August 1 – September 15**
- **Bag limit: One bull caribou per permit holder**

This framework establishes a reasonable cap on total nonresident participation while still maintaining opportunity for nonresident hunters.

Proposal Justification

Increasing Nonresident Hunting Pressure

Harvest data used in this proposal was obtained from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and compares resident and nonresident hunting statistics within Unit 26B. ADFG staff were able to provide nonresident harvest and participation data for the full fifteen-year period from 2010–2025. However, resident harvest data for 2025 was not yet finalized at the time this proposal was written because the spring season was still ongoing. According to ADFG staff, preliminary 2025 resident data is tracking similarly to 2024 levels. Therefore, statistical comparisons in this proposal use nonresident data from 2010–2025 and resident data from 2010–2024.

Based on preliminary data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, nonresident hunting pressure in Unit 26B has steadily increased in recent years. Since 2021, nonresident hunters have accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total hunting pressure in the unit.

Nonresident Share of Total Hunting Pressure – GMU 26B Year

Percent of Total Hunting Pressure (Nonresident)

2010 20.75%

2011 16.96%

2012 19.94%

2013 29.78%

- Unlimited nonresident hunting opportunity
- A liberal nonresident bag limit
- Increasing numbers of transporters, hunt planners, and other businesses catering to DIY nonresident hunters

These factors have led to a substantial rise in nonresident participation, particularly in areas that are road-accessible or boat-accessible. In these areas, hunters are often concentrated into relatively small portions of the unit.

When nonresident opportunity remains unlimited, it can also create a feedback cycle in which increased numbers of nonresident hunters attract additional transporters and commercial services, which in turn make the hunt even more accessible to additional nonresident hunters. As services expand and participation grows, hunting pressure can continue to increase year after year.

Over time, this dynamic has accelerated hunting pressure and intensified crowding in the most accessible portions of the unit. Without reasonable limits on participation, these trends will likely continue to worsen.

Hunter Density and Declining Hunt Quality

While the Central Arctic Caribou Herd may still support harvest biologically, excessive hunter density can significantly reduce hunt quality, hunter satisfaction, and opportunity for resident hunters.

High hunter density can result in:

- Reduced ability for hunters to locate animals
- Increased competition and crowding among hunters in accessible areas
- Greater likelihood of user conflicts

When participation levels become so high that crowding and competition prevent many residents from having a quality hunt, it becomes appropriate to evaluate and implement management tools that help restore balance.

Herd Status and Proactive Management

Recent population surveys indicate that the Central Arctic Caribou Herd is currently estimated at approximately 26,700 animals, a decline from the previous estimate of approximately 34,600 animals in 2022.

Taking proactive steps to manage participation levels before more serious conservation concerns arise is a responsible and precautionary approach to wildlife management.

Establishing reasonable limits on nonresident participation would demonstrate that the Board of Game is willing to act proactively in the interest of long-term herd sustainability, while also recognizing the importance of maintaining hunt quality and hunter satisfaction for Alaska residents who rely on these opportunities to harvest wild food for their families.

Precedent for This Management Approach

A similar management structure already exists in Game Management Units 1, 2, and 3 for black bear hunting. In those units, Alaska experienced a substantial increase in DIY nonresident hunters and transporter services, creating rapidly increasing hunting pressure.

In that situation, land managers and regulatory agencies could not effectively regulate the expanding transporter sector, which allowed participation to increase quickly as additional services began catering to DIY nonresident hunters. Guided hunting activity, however, was already regulated through land manager permitting systems, and hunting by Alaska residents and nonresidents accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred was not identified as a source of the increasing pressure concerns.

As a result, the Board of Game implemented a draw permit system specifically for nonresident hunters NOT using a registered guide and NOT accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred. This regulatory structure allowed managers to place reasonable limits on the segment

of hunters responsible for the rapid increase in participation while still maintaining opportunity for guided hunters and traditional resident-family hunting arrangements.

The same underlying conditions now exist in Unit 26B, where rapidly increasing participation by DIY nonresident hunters—often facilitated by transporters and hunt-planning services—is contributing to rising hunting pressure, user conflicts, and decreased hunter satisfaction. Implementing a similar regulatory structure in Unit 26B would follow an established management approach that has already been adopted by the Board of Game in other regions of Alaska when faced with comparable circumstances.

Benefits of a Limited Draw System

Placing DIY nonresident hunting opportunity on a limited draw permit system with a one-bull bag limit represents a reasonable and balanced management action.

This approach would:

- Maintain nonresident hunting opportunity
- Establish a clear cap on nonresident participation
- Reduce crowding in heavily used areas
- Minimize user conflicts between hunters
- Improve overall hunt quality and hunter satisfaction for Alaska residents

Second degree of kindred and Guided Hunting Justification

Maintaining nonresident caribou hunters using a registered guide or accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred on a harvest ticket system would ensure that these hunters continue to have reasonable opportunity to hunt while the primary source of increasing participation—unguided nonresident hunters—would be managed through a draw permit structure.

Preliminary data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game indicates that, on average, fewer than 30 guided nonresident caribou hunters participate in Unit 26B annually, representing a very small and consistent portion of overall hunting participation within the unit.

Three federal guide concessions on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in GMU 26B — ARC 10, ARC 9, and ARC 6 — operate within the area affected by this proposal, and portions of Gates of the Arctic National Preserve may also support guided hunting activity. These federally authorized guiding operations represent a relatively small and defined portion of overall hunting activity in the unit and are not the primary drivers of the increasing nonresident pressure and crowding concerns addressed by this proposal. Hunting guides operating on these federal lands already have limits on the numbers of hunters they can take each year put in place the federal land manager.

Because guided hunters and nonresidents hunting with resident family members typically represent a smaller and more controlled segment of overall hunting participation, maintaining harvest ticket opportunity for these hunters would allow these traditional hunting arrangements to continue while the draw permit system focuses on moderating the rapidly increasing participation of unguided nonresident hunters.

Additionally:

- Transporters and other businesses catering to DIY nonresident caribou hunters would still be able to offer their services to significant pool of nonresident draw permit holders
- These businesses would also still be able to provide and offer services to Alaska residents

Intent of the Proposal

The intent of this proposal is not to eliminate nonresident hunting opportunity. Rather, the goal is to:

- Implement a reasonable management structure
- Balance opportunity among user groups
- Reduce excessive crowding in accessible areas and improve hunter satisfaction
- Protect the ability of Alaska residents to harvest caribou for their families

By proactively managing DIY nonresident participation through a draw permit system, the Board of Game can help ensure that Unit 26B remains a sustainable and high-quality hunting opportunity for current and future generations of Alaskans while still allowing nonresident hunters to participate in a fair and regulated manner.

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

Overcrowding, user conflict, and decreasing hunter satisfaction in Unit 26b for caribou hunting.

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

Yes this proposal was discussed with numerous other Alaska residents, hunting guides in 26B, and was supported by the Mat Su Valley AC.

PROPOSED BY: Grant Kopplin

(OI-F26-026)
