

Proposal 55

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

Establish a subsistence registration permit hunt for caribou in the Cape Newenham and Goodnews Bay region as follows:

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

5 AAC 85.025(a)(18) to read:

Unit 18:

(A) Except as provided in (B) of this paragraph, there is no open season for caribou.

(B) In that portion of Unit 18 **bounded by Goodnews Bay and the Goodnews River on the south, extending east to the Osviak River, and north to Carter Bay, including the Cape Newenham and Togiak coastal region**, caribou may be taken under a subsistence registration permit as follows:

- **Season:** January 1 -February 28
- **Bag Limit:** One caribou per household per regulatory year
- **Harvest Limit:** Not to exceed 70 caribou annually
- **Permit:** Registration permit required
- **Eligibility:** Residents of Togiak, Goodnews, Twin Hills, Manokotak, & Platnium

The department may close the season by emergency order when the harvest limit is reached.

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

This proposal seeks to address a regulatory gap in Unit 18 by recognizing and managing a localized population of caribou in the Cape Newenham and Goodnews Bay region that are consistently present but currently unavailable for legal harvest under state regulations.

Recent Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) research identifies these animals as part of the **Cape/Goodnews caribou group**, an outlying population that is monitored separately from the core Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH). ADF&G findings indicate that these animals do not meaningfully mix with core MCH groups and occupy distinct seasonal ranges and calving areas (Lichwa and Landsiedel 2024).

Although caribou are observed annually in this area, existing regulations continue to treat them as part of the broader Mulchatna Herd, which is currently closed to hunting. As a result, local subsistence users are unable to utilize a readily available resource, increasing pressure on other important food sources such as moose and fish.

ADF&G has further noted that these outlying groups, including the Cape/Goodnews population, may warrant consideration for **separate management due to their lack of intermixing with core MCH animals and distinct calving behavior** (Lichwa and Landsiedel 2024).

This proposal requests that the Board establish a conservative, subsistence-only hunting opportunity for this localized population, limited to a maximum harvest of 70 animals annually, and restricted to the January-February timeframe when animals are most accessible and impacts to broader herd dynamics are minimized.

The intent is to align regulatory structure with current scientific understanding and observed conditions on the landscape, provide a limited and sustainable subsistence opportunity, and improve clarity and consistency in the management of caribou in Unit 18.

Clarify existing regulatory obligations

This proposal would clarify how caribou present in the Cape Newenham and Goodnews Bay region are classified and managed. ADF&G currently identifies these animals as a distinct outlying group and excludes them from core Mulchatna population estimates, yet they remain regulated under MCH frameworks (Lichwa and Landsiedel 2025).

Establishing a localized management approach would resolve this inconsistency and align regulation with current biological understanding.

Improve or streamline procedures and permitting:

Establishing a localized management structure would allow for a clear and predictable permitting system (e.g., a registration-based subsistence hunt with a defined harvest cap), replacing the current situation where no pathway exists for legal harvest despite the presence of animals.

Reduce administrative burdens

A defined management structure with a fixed winter season (January-February) and conservative harvest limit would reduce the need for emergency actions or unclear enforcement situations, particularly in years when animals are present in accessible areas.

Improve communication procedures

This proposal would provide clear guidance to local residents regarding when and how caribou may be harvested. Aligning regulations with ADF&G-recognized population structure will reduce confusion and improve compliance.

Provide greater transparency with respect to standards and decision-making

By establishing a defined season, harvest cap, and subsistence-only framework, the Board would create a transparent and consistent management approach. This proposal is directly supported by ADF&G findings that the Cape/Goodnews group functions independently from the core Mulchatna herd and may be appropriate for separate management consideration (Lichwa and Landsiedel 2024).

References:

Lichwa, E., and J. Landsiedel. 2024. Mulchatna Caribou Herd Photo Survey Memorandum. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation.

Lichwa, E., and J. Landsiedel. 2025. Mulchatna Caribou Herd Photo Survey Memorandum. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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

Togiak fish and game advisory committee

PROPOSED BY: Togiak Fish & Game Advisory Committee (OI-F26-087)
