

Proposal 6

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

Amend 5 AAC 85.025 to add a population-based closure for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd as follows:

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

Amend 5 AAC 85.025 to add a population-based closure for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd to read:

Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, when the Western Arctic Caribou Herd population has declined to 75,000 animals or fewer, the hunting season for caribou from the Western Arctic Herd shall be closed in Units 22, 23, 24B remainder, 24C, 24D, 26A. The season shall remain closed until the department determines that the population exceeds 100,000 animals and that a harvestable surplus exists.

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

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) was once the largest caribou herd in Alaska, but over the past two decades it has declined by nearly 70 percent. Without significant management intervention, the herd is expected to continue to decline. A July 2025 photo census estimated the herd at 121,000 caribou, representing an approximately 20 percent decrease since 2023.

At its annual meeting, the WACH Working Group assigned the herd a management status of “Critical, Declining,” based on the current population estimate of below 130,000 and an adult cow survival rate of less than 80 percent. Although specific management actions and harvest recommendations are associated with this status, the Working Group is proposing a hunting closure to reflect the severity of the continued population decline and support long-term recovery.

The Board of Game should establish a temporary closure of the hunting season for caribou from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) in Units 22, 23, 24B remainder, 24C, 24D, 26A, if the herd population declines below 75,000. The season should remain closed until the WACH population exceeds 100,000.

Establishing a precautionary regulatory closure in response to the continued decline of the WACH would help prevent further reductions at critically low population levels and support the long-term sustainability of the herd.

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

This proposal was developed by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. The Working Group consists of Alaska Native subsistence users from communities within the range of the herd, other Alaskan hunters, guides, transporters, conservationists, and reindeer herders. Since its formation in 1997, the Working Group has submitted numerous advisory recommendations to government agencies, regulatory boards, and other bodies to support decisions that will ensure the long-term conservation of the WACH.

PROPOSED BY: Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (OI-F26-119)
