

Petition for Emergency Regulations for Unit 13 Nelchina caribou

ADF&G petitions for emergency regulations to increase harvest from the Nelchina Caribou Herd. The action is required to keep the herd within population objectives. The objectives were designed to prevent over-use of the range which would result in yields less than optimums and to prevent long term periods of low harvest.

Sustainable objectives for the herd have been determined to be 35,000-40,000 caribou. The most recent population estimate indicates that the herd is substantially above objectives at 49,950 caribou. In addition, the autumn calf ratios are 48 calves:100 cows, and the abundance of bulls (56 bulls:100 cows) in the herd indicates that the population continues to increase despite substantial harvest. To date, 5,022 caribou have been harvested which means the harvest could essentially double and we would likely still be above the upper end of the population objective.

Additional increases in harvest are needed to realize the consumptive use opportunity without it being lost to non human caused mortality, over use of range, or stochastic weather events.

Significant numbers of Nelchina caribou are wintering within Unit 13 this winter. In past years, the herd has migrated out of the unit to areas where additional winter harvest is problematic due to land status and the presence of other herds with lower harvestable surplus. The accessibility of the herd this year has resulted in reaching the 300 caribou cap for the Community Subsistence hunt for the first time. There is no reason to limit harvest in this or any other hunt at this time and additional harvest would be preferable to make progress towards meeting objectives.

We ask the board to find an emergency and make emergency regulations to meet objectives and to take advantage of harvest opportunity that will be lost if the herd declines. We also ask the board to make regulations that provide for additional harvest opportunity this year without causing the herd too much stress from harvest pressure and creating additional user conflicts due to crowding. Options to accomplish this include the following:

Change the bag limit for RM566 and the CC001 to 2 caribou per household.

Eliminate the cap on CC001 to ensure that the season remains open through the normal closing date.

Create a new on line registration hunt with a bag limit of 1 caribou for dates to be determined. The department will announce brief open periods to determine the level of participation and identify issues with the hunt that should be avoided. For example, the department would open the registration process on-line, then open the hunt for 2 or 3 days with a 3 day reporting requirement, then close the season. Additional open seasons can be announced based on the results of that hunt.

Both RM566 and CC001 will remain open through March 31, the normal closing date. Emergency regulations are effective for 120 days.