

During the 11/18/2020 Board of Game meeting, the board clarified their intent to address Unit 9, 17, 18 and 19 at the Central and Southwest Region meeting.

Note: The range of the Mulchatna caribou herd is Units 9 and 17 in the Central & Southwest Region; Unit 18 for the Western Arctic/Western Region; and Unit 19 for the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region. The Board of Game is scheduled to address only the Central/Southwest Region units at this meeting.

PROPOSAL 20

5 AAC 85.025 (3)(4)(12)(13)(14). Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

5 AAC 92.062. Priority for subsistence hunting; Tier II permits.

Establish Tier II subsistence hunting season and bag limit for the Mulchatna caribou herd (MCH) as follows:

The proposed structure would replace the existing RC503 permit across the entire range of the MCH with a Tier II subsistence hunting structure providing up to 5,000 permits, a bag limit of one caribou, and updated season dates in Units 9A, 18, 19A, and 19B from August 1 to September 30 and November 15 to March 15, providing a break during the rut. The season in Units 9B, 9C, and 17 would continue to extend until March 30. No nonresident opportunity would be provided.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The current harvest strategy across the range of the Mulchatna caribou herd (MCH) is administered under registration caribou permit RC503 which allows up to two caribou. In Units 9A, 9C (within the Alagnak River drainage), 18, 19A and 19B, the season runs from August 1 to March 15. In Units 9B, 9C (the portion of north of the north bank of the Naknek River and south of the Alagnak River drainage) and 17, the season is 15 days longer, from August 1 to March 31.

Additional caribou seasons in these units are available for residents targeting the Northern Alaska and Southern Alaska Peninsula herds in Units 9C and 9E (TC505) and for residents and nonresidents in Unit 9D (harvest ticket). Registration permit RC501 provides resident opportunity on the Nushagak Peninsula caribou herd in portions of Units 17A and 17C. Both residents and nonresidents can also hunt caribou in Units 19C and 19D under a general season harvest ticket.

According to 5 AAC 92.062, when nonsubsistence uses of a game population have been eliminated and the taking of game must be further restricted to ensure that the population is maintained and managed on a sustained yield basis, or to ensure the continuation of subsistence uses of the population, hunting permits must be issued and allocated under the Tier II system. The MCH has been in decline since the late 1990s and has failed to stabilize. Over the course of the last 5–10 years, the MCH has not met intensive management goals or the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence, which is 2,100 to 2,400 caribou (ANS). There has been no nonresident harvest of this herd since the 2000s, and bag limits on this herd have consistently remained reduced for residents. The herd’s decline to an estimated 13,500 caribou in 2019 initiated another range-wide bag limit reduction followed by an early closure of the RC503 hunt.

In addition to establishing a Tier II harvest structure, we propose a) changing the hunt season to exclude harvest during the rut so that animals can breed without the additional pressure exerted on the herd by hunters, and b) standardizing the season across most of the MCH range to reduce hunter confusion and encourage reporting.

PROPOSED BY: The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-060)
