

Note: Game Management Units 12 and 20 are outside the scope of the Central Southwest Region meeting.

PROPOSAL 49

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

Eliminate the harvest of Nelchina caribou as follows:

Close caribou hunting for six years or until the herd reaches the midpoint of the management objective of 37,500. This includes caribou hunting closures in Units 11, 12, 13, 14B, and 20E when Nelchina caribou are present.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Eliminate any incidental take of Nelchina caribou due to the dramatic population decline seen in recent years. With an estimated population of 7,000-8,000 in fall 2023 and a population objective of 35,000-40,000, ensuring no harvest occurs of Nelchina caribou is crucial to rebuilding the herd. We are requesting a six-year hunting moratorium, or hunting closures until the population recovers and reaches the midpoint of the population objective of 37,500. This request is consistent with the March 2023 AITRC recommendation RC081 (see Attachment A).

For the 2023-2024 hunting season, both state and federal harvest of the Nelchina caribou within Unit 13 was closed; with the herd at such a low population estimate and after another heavy snow load, it is expected that winter mortality and calf recruitment will exasperate current population trends. For the herd's future longevity, AITRC asks for a six-year moratorium of the Nelchina caribou or until the herd reaches the midpoint of the population objective of 37,500. In addition, it is crucial that the Board of Game expand closures to all Units Nelchina occupies, or when present, to reduce any incidental take of a herd that has experienced such a rapid decline in recent years. This would include Units 11, 12, 13, 14B, and 20E.

Looking at reports and figures produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in the Nelchina Caribou News 2017 (Figure 1) and Nelchina Caribou News 2023 (Figure 2), it is clear that GPS collared individuals reside within the Units recommended for closure. In addition, it has been observed through GPS collar data and radio tracking in fall 2012-2015 that considerable mixing occurred with Nelchina caribou within Unit 14B. Through the capture effort 22 animals were deployed with GPS collars and through tracking 40% of the caribou traveled into Unit 13E and 13A (Peltier and Brockman 2020).

It is critical that regulations are adopted to ensure the Nelchina caribou herd's additional protection while it is at one of the lowest populations observed in the last 50 years. This will allow the herd the best chance for a speedy recovery, as this herd has significant cultural ties and has been a staple food source for not only Tribal Citizens but many Alaskan residents as well.

Reference Cited:

Peltier, T. C., and C. Brockman. 2020. Caribou management report and plan, Game Management Units 14A and 14B: Report period 1 July 2012–30 June 2017, and plan period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Species Management Report and Plan ADF&G/DWC/SMR&P-2020-11, Juneau.

Note: The figures and attachments provided with this proposal are available on the proposal book website at: www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.proposalbook.

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

PROPOSED BY: Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC) (HQ-F24-042)
