

**Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group  
DRAFT – 2021 Meeting Summary**

**December 15, 2021**

Virtual - via Zoom Webinar & Teleconference

**DRAFT** for review & approval by WACH Working Group at December 2022 meeting

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group (WG) met virtually via Zoom webinar and teleconference on December 15, 2021 (Agenda in Attachment 1). The following is a summary of meeting presentations and Working Group members' discussion. Motions passed at the meeting and Assignments for follow-up actions are listed in Attachment 2. Working Group members' responses to the Caribou Roundtable form are included in Attachment 3. The Working Group "Binder" that includes all written materials referred to at the meeting is posted at [www.westernarcticcaribou.net](http://www.westernarcticcaribou.net)

**I. Call to Order** – WG Chair Vern Cleveland called the teleconference to order at 1:00 p.m.

**A. WACH WG Roll Call / Establish Quorum** – Quorum was met with 17 of 20 WG members present on the teleconference. The following table lists WG membership attendance at this meeting.

<b>Working Group Seat</b>	<b>Working Group Member</b>
1. Anchorage Advisory Committee .....	Neil DeWitt
2. Buckland, Deering, Selawik .....	Vida Coaltrain (not present) <sup>1</sup>
3. Anaktuvuk Pass, Nuiqsut.....	Eli Nukapigak (not present)
4. Elim, Golovin, White Mountain .....	Charles Saccheus (not present)
5. Fairbanks Hunters .....	David Kilbourn
6. Hunting Guides.....	Jake Jacobson
7. Kivalina, Noatak.....	Enoch Mitchell.
8. Kotzebue.....	Cyrus Harris (Vice Chair)
9. Koyukuk River (Huslia, Hughes, Allakaket, Bettles, Wiseman) .....	Jack Reakoff (alternate) <sup>2</sup>
10. Lower Kobuk River (Noorvik, Kiana). .....	Vern Cleveland, Sr. (Chair)
11. Middle Yukon River (Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, Kaltag).....	Michael Stickman
12. Point Hope and Point Lay.....	Caroline Cannon (alternate)
13. Nome .....	Charlie Lean
14. Conservationists.....	Tim Fullman
15. Northern Seward Peninsula (Teller, Brevig Mission, Wales, Shishmaref) .....	Elmer Seetot, Jr.
16. Reindeer Herders Association .....	Tom Gray
17. Southern Seward Peninsula (Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, Stebbins, St. Michael, Kotlik) .....	Morris Nassuk
18. Transporters .....	Brad Saalsaa
19. Upper Kobuk River (Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk).....	Bill Bernhardt
20. Atqasuk, Utqiagvik, Wainwright.....	Wanda Kippi

**MOTION** by Mickey Stickman, second by Tim Fullman, to approve the following primary and alternate members to the WACH Working Group – Seat 2 primary Vida Coaltrain, alternate Raymond Lee, Jr.; Seat 14 alternate Alex Johnson; Seat 15 alternate Alfred Ningeulook; and Seat 18 primary Brad Saalsaa, alternate Brian Alberts. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote. (NOTE: The Working Group is still seeking an alternate member for Seat 20.)

<sup>1</sup> Seat 2 primary member Vida Coaltrain had planned to attend but telephone service was down in her community.

<sup>2</sup> Seat 9 primary member Pollock Simon, Sr., was also connected to the teleconference and could hear the proceedings, but the Working Group members could not hear him. He did not participate in discussions or voting. For this 2021 meeting, alternate Jack Reakoff represented the Koyukuk River region.

- B. Audience Attendance:** Public and agency attendance was not taken. However, 80+ people were present in the webinar/teleconference audience, including agency staff that presented information to the Working Group.
- C. Approve Agenda:** Facilitator Jan Caulfield reviewed the agenda (Attachment 1). MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Mickey Stickman, to approve the meeting agenda. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote.

## II. Western Arctic Caribou Herd Status & Management Level

**Western Arctic Caribou Herd Overview and 2021 Census** – Alex Hansen, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) Division of Wildlife Conservation, presented information about the WACH population status and trends (see p. 13 in 2021 WG Binder). The presentation laid the foundation for the WG’s later recommendations regarding future management of the caribou herd (see p. 6 below). Key points in the ADFG presentation included:

- Herd population declining – The July 2021 photo census estimated 188,000 caribou in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. Another photo census will be conducted in 2022. Census numbers for past years: 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. In the two years between the 2019 and 2021 census, the herd declined nearly 12% per year.
- Calving (parturition) is below average – Summer surveys show that 68% of collared cows had calves in 2021, compared with 67% in 2020, 81% in 2019, 86% in 2018, and 83% in 2017. The long-term average calving rate is 70% (1992-2021).
- Yearling recruitment is average – Yearling recruitment in 2021 was 17:100 yearlings:adults, which is the same as in 2020 and matches the 25-year average (1998-2021).
- Fall herd composition – The bull:cow ratio in fall 2021 was 47 bulls:100 cows.
- Adult cow survival is below average – Cow survival rate for 2021 was 73%, which is below the long-term average of 81% (1987-2020). Adult cow survival is the primary concern related to the recent population decline.
- Cause of mortality – Primary causes of mortality are predation, “unknown”, and hunting. Daily mortality rates are highest in the spring season.
- Population trend – Since 2005, the herd has had more years of decline than increase or stability, with cow mortality higher and calf recruitment lower.
- Collaring – The agencies have transitioned to helicopter captures with net guns to place collars on caribou (instead of captures of caribou as they are crossing the Kobuk River at Onion Portage). In spring 2021, 52 collars were deployed, primarily in the Upper Kobuk region.
- Management level per WACH Cooperative Management Plan – Each year, the Working Group considers what management level should be assigned to the Western Arctic herd, based on Table 1 of the WACH Cooperative Management Plan (updated 2019). At its meeting on December 14, 2021, the WACH Technical Committee recommended that the Working Group assign the management level “Preservative, Declining”, based on the herd size (within the range of 130,000-200,000) and adult cow survival rate less than 80%. (Noted that calf recruitment is greater than 15:100, which is the third parameter considered in Table 1.) At this “Preservative” management level, the Cooperative Management Plan indicates that the following management recommendations should be considered (see Table 2 in the 2019 Management Plan):
  - No harvest of calves
  - Limit harvest of cows by residents through permit hunts and/or village quotas
  - Limit subsistence harvest of bulls only if <30 bulls:100 cows (NOTE: that is not the case in 2021, when bull:cow ratio was 47:100)
  - Restrict harvest to residents only, according to State and federal law. Closure of some federal public lands may be necessary.

(NOTE – Later in the meeting, the Working Group passed a motion designating the Western Arctic herd as “Preservative, Declining” in 2021. See page 6, below.)

- Need for more accurate harvest data – The Alaska Board of Game has determined an Amount Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) of 8,000-12,000 animals per year for the combined Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds. The annual harvest is estimated at 12,000 (+/- 1,750) animals including approximately 3,600 cows. At a 6% harvest rate, ADFG estimates that there is a harvestable surplus of approximately 11,300 animals (bulls and cows combined). However, ADFG does not receive enough harvest reporting from local hunters (e.g., through hunt registration and reporting) to provide accurate and complete data on the annual local harvest number. This lack of data makes it difficult to manage the herd well – as total harvest is really not known.

Working Group members’ questions and discussion on herd status included:

- Q: Is ADFG confident in the 2021 census count result?  
A: Yes. The census was a two-week effort spread across the herd’s range. Caribou were mostly in large groups that contained the majority of the collared animals, indicating that there were not groups of animals splintered off of the main groups that were being missed in the census.
- Q: How many collars are out?  
A: Try to maintain a sample of about 100 collars. Deployed 52 collars in 2021.
- Q: Concerned that so much of the cause of mortality is “unknown”. Concern that winter rain that freezes on the winter range can lead to starvation  
A: It can be difficult to determine cause of death for some animals that are found, especially if they died in winter and we cannot get to the carcass until spring or summer. ADFG does its best to determine if there was predation, or hunting, but cannot always tell the reason for the death.
- Q: Very concerned that there has been a 23% decrease in the herd size over two years. What is happening to cause this much mortality?  
A: Caribou herds do oscillate up and down substantially. ADFG is not seeing evidence of any particular, drastic mortality event. Predation and winter range conditions (e.g., freezes, deeper snows) are likely contributing factors.
- Q: Is the Teshekpuk caribou herd declining?  
A: The Teshekpuk herd is not declining. Cow survival is high at around 90% and in 2017 (last census) the herd was at about 55,000 caribou.
- Comment – Noted that the count of the WACH is one of the best, most accurate counts of a wildlife population in Alaska. Concern with high cow mortality and suggest that we need to reduce cow harvest. Recognize that this is easier said than done.
- Q: Could some of the Western Arctic herd be moving up into the Teshekpuk herd? A: ADFG’s experience and research indicates that any interchange between the herds would usually be Teshekpuk caribou joining the Western Arctic herd.
- Q: Question about where the herd is wintering.  
A: There is very little fidelity to any particular winter range. The herd can be counted on to gather at its usual calving grounds and post-calving at Lisburne peninsula, but the rest of the year they are less predictable in where they migrate and where they winter – and that can be different each year.
- Q: Could it be that as fall migration has become later, the herd is passing by villages later in the fall, when bulls are in rut and not as desirable to hunt, so people are taking more cows?  
A: That may be a factor. To address the herd decline, it would be better for hunters to take young bulls and not cows (when the older bulls are in rut and not desired). The Alaska Board of Game changed the regulation to allow for a year-round bull harvest, so people can take young bulls instead of cows at any time of year.
- Comment – In fall/early-winter 2021, there are caribou up in the Upper Kobuk region that are in good condition; no ice, no rain.
- Comment – Noted that caribou herds do cycle up and down in size. Opinion that we should not overreact with concern to the declining trend.

**National Park Service Caribou Monitoring** – Kyle Joly, NPS, presented information on the movements of caribou the NPS has collared (see p. 23 in WG Binder). Points from the presentation:

- **Fall 2021 migration routes & movements:**
  - In October 2021, caribou were spread out as they migrated south across their range.
  - There were caribou that crossed the Kobuk River at Onion Portage in 2021, but they were very late in crossing.
  - Deflected migration routes:
    - In 2021, NPS noted caribou that came south along the coast, encountered the Red Dog Road and the road out of Kivalina, and did not cross. Animals turned and tried another direction. Research has shown that some caribou that encounter the Red Dog Road can be delayed in their migration by a month.
    - In 2021, NPS also saw deflected and delayed migration for caribou trying to cross the Kobuk River near Kiana and along the Colville River, in both cases this appeared to be due to pan ice that had formed and made it harder to cross.
    - Caribou moved largely uninhibited southward through Noatak National Preserve in fall 2021.
- **Migration distance** – The mean distance of travel by collared caribou from September 2020 - August 2021 was 1,691 miles, which is higher than the previous year but below the average of 2,000 miles.
- **Fall migration, Noatak River crossing**– There was a fairly usual distribution of where the herd crossed the Noatak River in fall 2020, except that there were no caribou coming south along the coast. This was the first time that had happened since 2010 and this impacts hunters on the west side of the range.
- **Fall migration, Kobuk River crossing** – From 2010-2015 over 80% of the collared caribou crossed the Kobuk River to winter farther south. From 2016-2020, only an average 34% crossed the Kobuk River, with a low of just 6% of the herd crossing in 2020. This has hugely impacted subsistence hunters’ access to caribou in the southern part of the herd’s range. The average date of Kobuk River crossing has gotten much later. Since just 2010, the date of the first animal crossing the Kobuk has shifted by two months – from late August until early November. The average date of crossing for 2021 was November 2. This creates a situation where hunters who would rather take the big bulls do not want them because they are in rut at that time – and this can increase hunting pressure on cows.
- **Overwintering** – There has been a dramatic change in recent years in where Western Arctic caribou are wintering, in terms of NPS conservation units in the herd’s range. For the last three winters, no caribou have wintered in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve – while 5-6 years ago 75% of the collared animals wintered there. Recently, wintering has been concentrated in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve.
- **Spring migration** – The route and timing of spring migration doesn’t show as much variation over the years, as cows are motivated to get to the calving grounds and timing of calving has not been changing (calving is quite consistently the first days of June).
- **Recent research papers of interest** –
  - **Fidelity to the calving grounds** – Looking at WAH calving for 2010-2017, this research showed that the herd has high fidelity to the general area of the calving grounds (Utukok Uplands in the North Slope), likely due to the very high quality forage. This general area has not changed since the first study to document calving areas for the herd in the early 1960s, and local knowledge indicates the herd has been calving in this area for more than 100 years.  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/cariboucalvinglocales.htm>
  - **Seasonal fidelity of areas used or traveled by WAH caribou** – NPS research analyzed the movements of adult cow caribou from 2010-2019. Fidelity was greatest to calving and insect relief areas. Fidelity was lower at the end of summer and in winter, seasons that are less predictable due to variability in weather conditions. Spring migration routes and timing were less variable than fall migration, perhaps due to the demand of calving.  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/bouseasonalfidelity.htm>
  - **Impacts of development on caribou** – Two projects investigated impacts of development. One developed a technique that applies circuit theory to predict effects of proposed roads on the WAH

and nearby communities. The other used simulation models to look at effects of potential development within the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (NPR-A) on caribou calving for the WAH and Teshekpuk Caribou Herd. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/toolstoassessimpacts.htm>

- Global status of migrations – Long distance, terrestrial migrations of ungulate species are imperiled globally. The Global Initiative on Ungulate Migration is working to map and preserve existing migration routes. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/migrationmapping.htm>

Working Group members' questions and discussion on the NPS presentation included:

- Q: With regard to caribou migration being diverted near Kiana in fall 2021, is there any evidence that boat traffic on the Kobuk River during hunting season is contributing to that diversion or causing caribou to cross the river later?  
A: No, not seeing this as a cause. The diversion observed near Kiana in 2021 was due to pan ice conditions that dissuaded the caribou from crossing.
- Q: Noted that the herd's migration through the Noatak National Park and Preserve seemed to be unhindered. Does this show that guide, transporter and sport hunting activity do not affect the migration?  
A: Do not see evidence of major, long-term impacts of sport hunting camps on the caribou migration routes. However, collar locations are recorded only every eight hours. There may be smaller-scale deflections of caribou that occur within that eight-hour time frame that we do not detect that still could send caribou away from an area being hunted by a subsistence hunter, which would be a concern for that hunter.
- Q: If the Ambler Road is constructed, will villages south of that road suffer lack of caribou?  
A: If the migrating caribou react in a manner similar to what we see at the Red Dog Road, animals could be delayed in their migration by a month or more, or may never cross the road to get farther south. We need to know more about what would happen to these caribou when their migration is deflected and delayed. This likely would have higher impact on local communities along the western stretch of the proposed road, where there is more subsistence caribou harvest in communities south of the proposed route.
- Q: Do the agencies try to determine the effect of different factors – like predators, wind direction, food availability – on caribou migration patterns?  
A: Yes, we particularly see that food availability affects where caribou go – including food quality and ability to access it (e.g., affected by snow conditions). We do not have enough data on predators in northwest Alaska to be able to evaluate effects of predation on caribou migration patterns. The environmental factors that most affect the start of fall migration are dropping air temperatures and accumulation of snow. We are generally seeing warmer temperatures and later snowfalls in the fall season, which is driving later fall migration timing.

**Western Arctic Herd Registration Permits** – Alex Hansen, ADFG, discussed registration permits RC907 and RC800 (see p. 33 in the WG Binder). Key points from this presentation:

- The primary intent of the registration permits is to get more complete data on how many caribou are harvested each year by resident hunters, so we all can better understand how harvest affects the herd's abundance.
- Without more accurate data on how many caribou are harvested each year by local hunters, we are not certain if we need to be concerned about the effect of harvest on population trends.
- ADFG estimates the Western Arctic Herd harvest at between 12,000-15,000 per year from 1999-2020. ADFG estimates the current harvest at 12,000 per year, including about 3,600 cows. The harvest may be less – but we don't have the data to confirm.
- Non-local hunters harvest 300-350 bulls/year. From a biological perspective, this harvest level does not affect the herd's population size or trend.
- It is also important to know how many bulls and how many cows are harvested. ADFG believes that the harvest is usually about 70% bulls and 30% cows – but, there is not adequate data to confirm this

assumed ratio. When the herd is declining, having more complete and accurate data regarding the proportion of the harvest that is cows would help managers and hunters ensure the conservation of the herd.

- ADFG needs to increase its public outreach, to explain that harvest reporting will help conserve the herd for the future. While the harvest reporting rate for those who receive permits is high, many local hunters are still not obtaining the registration permits.

Working Group members noted:

- Comment – One Working Group noted that they have a permit, but have not returned the harvest report because they did not have opportunity to take a caribou yet this year in the Kotzebue area. There could be other hunters in this same situation.
- Comment – Noted that near Brevig Mission they are encountering more bull caribou during the fall migration. Tend to go after bull caribou because they provide more meat.

**Working Group Decision on Herd Management Level** – The Working Group discussed the recommendation from the Technical Committee that the herd management level be set at “Preservative, Declining”, per Table 1 of the WACH Cooperative Management Plan (see p. 2 above and p. 19 in the WG Binder).

Alex Hansen, ADFG, noted that the most relevant recommendation from the Cooperative Management Plan in the “Preservative, Declining” category would likely be the possibility of reducing cow harvest in some manner. He also emphasized the important need for more complete data about local harvest. Alex noted that the next opportunity for a change in state caribou harvest regulations would be through an Agenda Change Request (ACR) to the Board of Game in November 2022 (for a regulation that would take effect July 1, 2023), or at the regular Board of Game cycle in May 2023 (for a regulation that would take effect July 1, 2024). There is also the separate federal regulations process under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB). Alex noted that there will be another herd census in 2022.

Working Group members expressed the following (varied) viewpoints and ideas in discussion of the herd Management Level:

- Restricting non-local harvest should be the first action to take, before there is any restriction placed on subsistence harvest.
- The harvest of 3,600 cows per year seems high. Should the cow season be restricted to only when bulls are in rut? (ADFG responded that the 3,600 cows is an estimate; it is not based on actual harvest reporting.)
- We need accurate harvest reporting for local subsistence harvests.
- How can the Working Group help encourage local hunters to report their harvest? Ideas – Article in Caribou Trails? Working Group members taking a strong stance on harvest reporting and why it is important to the conservation of the herd?
- Forbidding cow harvest would have unintended consequences. If there is an absolute prohibition on taking a cow, then if people mistakenly shoot one they may abandon it and waste it. It might be better to limit cow harvest to some proportion of the hunters’ annual harvest – but not forbid it altogether.
- When bulls are in rut, local hunters typically take young bulls, not cows. However, local hunters do take cows in the winter, until springtime.
- We should not take action at this meeting on a cow harvest restriction. We need time to think it through and consider the implications of any restrictions on subsistence harvest and communities. Should not rush into a change – let’s talk about it and put a good plan together and bring it back to the Working Group later.
- Q: How many caribou were harvested on Seward Peninsula in 2020?  
A: RC 800 permit harvest data shows less than 200 caribou were harvested in 2020. Do not have harvest report data yet for 2021.

MOTION made by Neil DeWitt to propose an ACR to the Alaska Board of Game to have cow harvest open only when bulls are in rut. This Motion died for lack of a second.

MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Tom Gray, to set the Management Level for the Western Arctic Herd at “Preservative, Declining” per the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan, Table 1. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote.

Working Group discussion turned to what this new “Preservative, Declining” Management Level may mean in terms of management of the Western Arctic Herd. Tony Gorn, ADFG Division of Wildlife Conservation, noted that the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan (Table 2) lists four management recommendations that can be considered when the herd is “Preservative, Declining”. These are:

- No harvest of calves
- Limit harvest of cows by residents through permit hunts and/or village quotas
- Limit subsistence harvest of bulls only if <30 bulls:100 cows (NOTE: that is not the case in 2021, when bull:cow ratio is 47:100)
- Restrict harvest to residents only, according to State and federal law. Closure of some federal public lands may be necessary.

These are not management actions that would happen automatically. They are possible management changes for the Working Group to consider. Any change would still need to go through the state and federal regulatory processes. Tony Gorn reiterated that it is not possible to accurately judge the implications of change in management and whether the long-term harvest will be sustainable, because – while the biological data on the herd is outstanding – ADFG doesn’t have accurate and complete local harvest data.

In response to a question, Caroline Brown, ADFG Division of Subsistence, noted that it would be possible to conduct community caribou harvest surveys across all of Game Management Unit (GMU) 23, as an alternative to relying on hunters to individually report their harvest. However, surveying all communities would be expensive. Community surveys can also be a good tool for providing hunters with additional information, raising their awareness, and possibly building a stronger foundation for them reporting their caribou harvests in the future. Caroline requested that the ADFG Subsistence Division be involved in discussion of any proposed changes in caribou harvest regulations, because of potential effects on subsistence opportunities for local communities.

MOTION by Charlie Lean, second by Neil DeWitt, to adopt a Resolution to limit the harvest of cows in the Western Arctic Herd to no more than 25% of the total caribou harvest, through an individual quota, or a community quota, or a permit. After discussion (below), the motion FAILED on a roll call vote. Yes: 7 votes; No: 8 votes.<sup>3</sup>

Working Group members expressed the following (varied) viewpoints and ideas in discussion of the motion to limit the cow harvest:

- Agree that some modification to reduce cow harvest is going to be really important. But, want to hear from others in the region about what is the best way to do this.
- Before restrictions are put on subsistence harvests, harvest should be restricted to residents only (as in management recommendation #4).
- Concern expressed that reducing cow harvest by this much is “jumping in too fast”. We are talking about local peoples’ food. Monitor one more year and see what the census count is in 2022.

---

<sup>3</sup> NOTE: Working Group member Brad Saalsaa was not able to participate in the roll call vote on this Motion due to technical difficulty with his phone connection. Mr. Saalsaa indicated later that he was planning to vote in favor of the Motion. However, his vote would not have affected the outcome (motion would still have failed).

- Seeing lots of caribou near Atkasuk this year, with many calves, young bulls and cows. Doesn't see need for reducing cow harvest at this time. Don't go too quickly. Need to think this through thoroughly.
- Do not rush. Concerned about affect on access to important subsistence food, in a region where food costs are so high. Concerns about cost of living. Covid making costs even higher. We need to educate people about what is being considered and not act too soon.
- Too fast to decide. Concern that this management action would not be enforceable. We need to go the way of providing better information to the public and get everyone on board with the importance of having better reporting of harvest data.
- Adopting a "Resolution" would express the Working Group's recognition that there is a problem with too many cows being harvested.
- The problem with the cow harvest seems obvious – and it will take one to two years to make a regulatory change through the Board of Game. We need to look at something soon. Concern that there will be a big herd decline and we are at the edge of harvesting what is a "harvestable surplus". What is the reality of this herd surviving if we are losing 40,000 animals a year now? We need to be careful – this herd has been here thousands of years; let's not kill it in a few.
- Subsistence harvest numbers are really just speculative. We need accurate data on the annual cow harvest. Regarding management recommendation #4, it is a dire step to close hunting on public lands and we should not go there at this time.
- We need to especially reduce take of pregnant cows. It will take 1-2 years to enact a new regulation. Recognize that people subsist off the land and understand the concern about having access to subsistence foods, but if we don't get something in to the Board of Game soon we will miss the regulatory cycle and it will be 4-5 years down the road before we implement a change. Better to introduce something now – by the time the Board of Game considers it, there will be more data to consider at that time.
- We need to make sure we are giving deference to the needs of subsistence hunters of caribou.

### **III. State of Alaska Wildlife Harvest Regulations**

**Proposal 245** – Phillip Perry, ADFG, provided information on Proposal 245 to the Alaska Board of Game (p. 43 in WG Binder). This proposal would remove the current requirement that caribou, moose and bison rib meat remain naturally attached to the bone until the meat has been transported from the field or is processed for human consumption. MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Jake Jacobson, in favor of Proposal 245. Motion FAILED unanimously, on a voice vote.

**Assignment:** Jan Caulfield will draft a letter to the Alaska Board of Game, for the Chair's signature, opposing Proposal 245.

### **IV. Federal Wildlife Harvest Regulations**

**Proposal WP22-47** – Lisa Grediagin, USFWS Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), provided information on Proposal WP22-47, which would change regulations to allow calf harvest on federal lands in Unit 22 (p. 45 in WG Binder). The WACH Working Group submitted this proposal to the FSB. The intent of removing the calf harvest prohibition is to allow for calves to be harvested when they are lost from their mothers, are wandering unattached to the herd, and would die anyway. OSM has heard in comments from all user groups that hunters do not intentionally target or take calves. It was noted that this type of calf harvest is already allowed on state land in Unit 22 and on state and federal land in Unit 23.

MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Dave Kilbourn, to submit comment to the FSB in support of Wildlife Proposal WP22-47. After Board discussion (below), the motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Yes: 15 votes; No: 2 votes.

The following points were made during the Working Group’s discussion, both in favor of and opposition to the motion:

- Does it send a mixed message to support allowing calf harvest, when the herd is declining and we have just changed to the “Preservative, Declining” Management Level in the WACH Cooperative Management Plan? The plan’s recommendation for that management level is “no harvest of calves”.
- People do not target calves for harvest; this is to allow harvest of orphaned calves that would not survive in the field.
- It is a customary and traditional practice to use calfskin for clothing.
- Would rather see no calf harvest at all, in any GMUs statewide.
- Support this proposal as it makes regulations consistent on state and federal lands.

**Wildlife Closure Review 22-45** – Hannah Voorhees, OSM, provided information on Wildlife Closure Review WCR22-45 (p. 47 of WG Binder). This is a review of an existing year-round closure to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified subsistence users, on federal public lands: within a 10-mile wide corridor along the Noatak River from the western boundary of the Noatak National Preserve upstream to the confluence of the Cutler River; as well as within the northern and southern boundaries of the Eli and Aggie River drainages, respectively; and within the Squirrel River drainage. This closure has been in place since 2017 and is now up for FSB review. OSM’s preliminary conclusion is that the closure should remain in effect, as it has helped reduce user conflicts within the closure area, and is necessary to continue subsistence uses of the Western Arctic herd for federally qualified subsistence users and specifically for Noatak residents. The Northwest Arctic, North Slope and Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Councils (RAC) all voted to maintain the closure.

MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comment to the FSB in support of Wildlife Closure Review WCR22-45. After Board discussion (below), the motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Yes: 12 votes; No: 4 votes; Abstention: 1.

The following points were made during the Working Group’s discussion, both in favor of and opposition to the motion:

- We need to defer to the views of Noatak on this matter. The community supports keeping the closure in regulation.
- Can’t agree with closing caribou hunting on federal lands to non-federally qualified subsistence hunters. They harvest just 300 bulls out of the herd.
- Closing federal lands just displaces people to hunt in other areas, where user conflicts can then occur. And, the concentration of hunters along the boundary of the closed area could divert the caribou away from the area, which would hurt subsistence hunters who are expecting to hunt within the area.
- Rather than closing areas to hunting, it would be better to educate non-subsistence hunters on how to avoid user conflicts and avoid disrupting the caribou migration.

**Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01** – Hannah Voorhees, OSM, provided information on Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01 (p. 49 of WG Binder). Key points from Hannah’s presentation:

- WSA21-01 was submitted to the FSB by the Northwest Arctic RAC, requesting a closure of federal public lands in Unit 23 and 26A to caribou and moose hunting by non-federally qualified subsistence users from August 1 – September 30, 2021.<sup>4</sup> The North Slope RAC also supports this proposed closure. If approved, the WSA21-01 closure would be in effect for just one year.
- The OSM presentation today discusses the proposed closure for caribou hunting only (not moose).
- At its 2020 meeting, the WACH Working Group voted to support such a closure for caribou hunting in Unit 26, but did not address Unit 23 in that vote.

---

<sup>4</sup> The FSB deferred consideration of WSA21-01 until 2022, which would have the effect of changing the dates of the requested closure to the 2022 hunting season.

- The FSB has deferred action on WSA21-01 until 2022, and asked OSM to seek more input from many stakeholders, including the WACH Working Group. At the request of the Working Group's Executive Committee, OSM called each member of the Working Group prior to this meeting to discuss the closure request, and 16 members agreed to speak with them (11 were residents of the region, five were not residents of the region). The results of the interviews with Working Group members are found on p. 51 of the WG Binder.
- OSM welcomes additional input from the Working Group at this meeting and the Working Group can also provide written comment to the FSB on WSA21-01.

MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comment to the FSB in support of Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01 (related to both caribou and moose). After Board discussion (below), the motion FAILED on a roll call vote. Yes: 3 votes; No: 11 votes.

The following comments were made during the Working Group's discussion of WSA21-01, both in favor of and opposition to the motion. (Presented here in order in which comments were made by Working Group members):

- The 2020-21 hunting regulations include no closed season for resident hunters, with a bag limit of up to five caribou per day of either sex. For non-resident hunters, the season is August 1-September 30 with a bag limit of one bull. Local subsistence hunters have lots of opportunity throughout the year, plus the advantage of living close by. Before any further restriction is considered on non-subsistence hunting, we should begin by insisting that accurate reporting of harvest by subsistence users be required. Why is moose are included in this closure request? There is no justification given for limiting moose harvest to subsistence users only. I am opposed to this special action request, which would close caribou hunting to non-federally qualified subsistence hunters on over 60 million acres of Alaska federal public land and, as such, should not be put into effect. We don't know if the current harvest is sustainable or not. We need more data, more information, on what the subsistence harvest actually is.
- I support the organizations and the people that seek to close the federal lands, who have requested this closure in their federal area of concern in accordance with subsistence management criteria. The decline of the caribou herd is an example of a valid concern for subsistence users in that area. And, at some point there may be impacts elsewhere, such as the area where I live which is also a high subsistence use area. I support the closure as the request was made (for both caribou and moose).
- Because of my position on the Anchorage Advisory Council and representing the rest of the state of Alaska, I have to vote against this proposal.
- I originally voted for the closures a few years, when the State of Alaska allowed cow harvest by non-local hunters. However, non-residents are now allowed only to hunt bulls, and they take fewer than 300 bulls. I am opposed to this proposal.
- We are a caribou Working Group, so our discussion and comment on WSA21-01 should be only about caribou, not moose.
- The way WSA21-01 is written, it addresses both caribou and moose.
- The FSB are considering one closure request that covers both species. Our comments can't separate just caribou out of that closure request. It has to address both moose and caribou because both species are included in the special action that the FSB will be voting on.
- The people proposing the closure want to close federal lands for both moose and caribou – it is an area of concern that they have. It's not just a moose and caribou issue. It is a land use issue that the federal subsistence users have a right to have a say on. It is about more than just the species. It is about the use of an area – an area of subsistence concern that is rightfully theirs. I support the motion as it was made – for both species.
- You can't separate caribou out from the closure request. We have to vote on WSA21-01 as it is written.

- Consider tabling Working Group action on this issue until this question of it addressing both moose and caribou can be clarified, unless there is a suspense date on our action/comments. (In response, OSM noted that there is a time constraint; WSA21-01 will go before the FSB in spring 2022, before the fall 2022 hunting season. If the Working Group wants to comment on WSA21-01 they need to comment before the FSB takes action this spring.)

As presented to the public to date, the special action request WSA21-01 addresses both caribou and moose – and that confused consideration of this question. Hannah Voorhees, OSM, pointed out that the FSB will vote on the closure request for each species separately – OSM is splitting the closure requests into WSA21-01A for caribou and WSA21-01B for moose.

After lengthy discussion (see notes above), the Working Group determined that they needed to comment on WSA21-01 as it has been presented to the public and in the FSB record to this point – which is that it addresses both caribou and moose. The motion that they voted on (above) addressed both caribou and moose. That motion failed.

**Assignment:** Jan Caulfield will draft letters to the FSB, for the Chair’s signature, providing the Working Group’s comments on WP22-47, WCR22-45, and WSA21-01, in accordance with the motions/votes above.

## **V. Working Group Committee Reports**

**Resource Development Committee Update** – Tim Fullman, Chair of the Working Group’s Resource Development Committee, gave an update on resource development projects within the range of the herd (p. 65 in WG Binder).

Amblor Mining District Industrial Access Project (p. 66 in WG Binder)

- The Amblor Road Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision were issued in 2020, with a decision to allow construction of the road on Route A (see map on p. 66 of the WG Binder). There are two lawsuits filed challenging the road permits. In addition, the Alaska Industrial Development Authority (AIDEA) has not yet made a final decision on its investment to construct the road.
- In 2021, the Working Group sent a letter to the new Secretary of the Department of Interior Deb Haaland, to inform her of concerns regarding the proposed road and mine development and potential effects on the caribou herd and subsistence harvest (see letter on p. 67).
- The Working Group also sent comments to the AIDEA, asking for a better public process and sufficient notice for the opportunity to provide public comments (see letter on p. 70).
- AIDEA sent a letter regarding the data they are gathering in advance of their 2024 decision regarding whether to fund the road (see letter on p. 73).
- Amblor Metals plans for the 2022 field season are listed on p. 76 of the WG Binder. Activity will include: seasonal operations at Bornite camp and surrounding prospects between April-October 2022; mineral exploration, soil sampling and geologic mapping; camp expansion; environmental baseline studies; continued work with subsistence committee; compliance with Northwest Arctic Borough permits to avoid disturbance to the caribou migration; and local shareholder hiring. Amblor Metals’ plan is to avoid impacts to fall migrating caribou is to shutdown operations if there are five or more caribou within ¾ mile of their operations.
- Trilogy and South32 also have staked claims east of the Amblor Mining District, extending from the proposed Amblor Road (see map, p. 77).

National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) Revision (p. 78 in WG Binder)

- In January 2021, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a Record of Decision on the revision to the NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan. The new plan greatly increased the area available for leasing, from about 50% under the 2013 IAP to about 80% under the new IAP. This included shrinking the area formerly off-limits to leasing to protect the Western Arctic Herd calving grounds and insect relief area, and opening all Teshekpuk Caribou Herd calving and insect relief areas for leasing.
- In September 2021, the BLM was directed to review the new 2021 IAP for compliance with the Biden Administration’s climate goals. While this review is progressing, no oil and gas leases will be offered under the 2021 IAP.

Noatak – Red Dog Road (p. 80 in WG Binder)

- In 2019, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) announced it is partnering with the Northwest Arctic Borough and Native Village of Noatak to look into building a permanent gravel road connecting Noatak to the Delong Mountain Transportation System (DMTS, i.e., the Red Dog road). In 2020, the Working Group submitted a letter to DOT&PF relevant to minimizing impacts to the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds. The state’s planning process is ongoing and there is not currently an opportunity for comments.

Willow Master Development Plan (p. 81 in WG Binder)

- ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc.’s preferred alternative for the Willow project was approved by BLM in 2020. The project would expand oil and gas infrastructure in the northeastern NPR-A. Currently, a legal ruling has halted the Willow development and BLM is likely to revise their approval to address issues raised by the court. It is expected that there will be opportunities to comment on the project in spring 2022.

Anarraaq – Aktigirug Mining Exploration (p. 82 in WG Binder)

- Teck American, Inc, is proposing an exploration project to evaluate potential for new mineral deposits northeast of the Red Dog Mine. This would lead to construction of approximately eight miles of roads. The application with the Army Corps of Engineers was closed due to insufficient information, but Teck as recently indicated interest in reopening the application process.

The following comments and questions were raised in Working Group discussion of the Resource Development Committee report:

- Comment – Concern that ¾ mile is not enough buffer for shutting down operations at Bornite when caribou are approaching. We should request that they shut down operations when caribou are within five miles. Concern that in past seasons, there were caribou coming in within five miles of Bornite and there were still helicopters flying and other activity, but the operations were not shut down.
- Comment – Concern that the 211-mile Ambler Road will impact caribou migration. Our comments on the Ambler Road need to focus on closure of the road to traffic when caribou are migrating. Already seeing impacts on migration from the Red Dog mine road.

MOTION by Caroline Cannon, second by Cyrus Harris, to send a letter to Ambler Metals asking that they shut down operations at Bornite when there are five or more caribou within five miles of the operation. Following Working Group discussion (see below), the motion PASSED by roll call vote: 13 Yes votes; 3 No votes.

The following points were made during the Working Group’s discussion, both in favor of and opposition to the motion:

- Concern that Ambler Metals would not accept the increase to five miles. Perhaps they would adopt one mile?

- How would this be enforced? Doesn't expect that they would follow this operation restriction if there wasn't outside monitoring ensuring that it is happening.
- When Bornite shuts down operations, it just means that they will extend their operating season. This may also have consequences. It isn't practical to move everyone out – so generators will still be running which is a noise source.
- The Bornite project is on NANA Corporation land. Send the comment letter to NANA as well.
- For this to be enforced, there would need to be independent observers, rather than relying on the project to monitor and police itself.

**Assignment:** Jan Caulfield will work with Resource Development Chair Tim Fullman to draft a letter to Ambler Metals, for the Chair's signature, requesting that they change their caribou mitigation policy to shut down operations at Bornite when there are five or more caribou within five miles of the operation, in accordance with the motions/votes above. Copy the letter to NANA Corporation.

### **Communication Committee Update**

Heather Jameson, ADFG staff to the WACH Working Group's Communication Committee, prepared a committee report (p. 83 in WG Binder). The Working Group members were also asked to complete and return a questionnaire regarding communications. There was not time to verbally present the Communication Committee's report to the Working Group at the meeting. Key points in the report include:

- With input from the Communication Committee, the agencies provide information about the Western Arctic caribou herd to the public, including reports, publications, website content, social media, print media, and the annual Caribou Trails newsletter that is mailed to all post office box holders in the region.
- Additional education and communications projects include virtual presentations by research biologists and agency wildlife managers; professional development teacher workshops; hunter success working groups; and (upcoming) caribou conservation kit.
- For more information, contact Heather Jameson, ADFG, at [heather.jameson@alaska.gov](mailto:heather.jameson@alaska.gov)

### **VI. Community Harvest Assessment Program**

Helen Cold, ADFG Subsistence Division, prepared a report to the Working Group explaining that community harvest surveys (caribou focus) are being conducted in eight communities within the range of the Western Arctic herd (p. 97 in the WG Binder). However, there was not time to verbally present the report to the Working Group at the meeting. Key points in the report include:

- The communities included in the surveys are: Golovin, Selawik, Shungnak, White Mountain, Shishmaref, Noatak, Deering and Kobuk.
- Methods include household surveys, ethnographic interviews with mapping, and participant observation.
- The project started in 2019 and will continue to 2024.
- The report to the Working Group included: 2018-2019 estimates of caribou harvest by the communities of Golovin, Selawik, Shungnak and White Mountain (total harvest and pounds per capita); harvest timing; and harvest areas.
- For more information, contact Helen Cold, ADFG Subsistence Division, at [helen.cold@alaska.gov](mailto:helen.cold@alaska.gov)

### **VII. Business Meeting**

North American Caribou Workshop – 2023 – Kyle Joly, NPS, announced that a joint meeting of the North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference is scheduled to be held in Anchorage in May 2023. This meeting will bring together an international group of managers,

researchers, Indigenous and Local Knowledge holders, and other stakeholders to share their knowledge of caribou and other ungulates.

**Assignment:** Kyle Joly, NPS, will coordinate with the following WACH Working Group members, who indicated that they would like to be involved in planning for the conference: Vern Cleveland, Cyrus Harris, Tom Gray, Jake Jacobson, Neil DeWitt, Morris Nassuk, Mickey Stickman, and Wanda Kippi.

Approval of 2021 WACH WG Meeting Summary (p. 107 in WG Binder) – MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Mickey Stickman, to approve the 2020 WACH WG meeting summary. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Caribou Roundtable Forms – Jan Caulfield asked Working Group members to fill-out and send in the Caribou Roundtable Forms, using the stamped, addressed form.

Election of Vice Chair – MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Caroline Cannon, to nominate Cyrus Harris to serve as Vice Chair of the WACH Working Group for 2022-2024 and asked for unanimous consent. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

2022 WACH Working Group Meeting – The Working Group plans to meet in-person on December 14-15, 2022 in Anchorage.

**VIII. Adjourn** – MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to adjourn the meeting. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

## **Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group Meeting**

**December 15, 2021 1:00 - 5:30pm**

Via Zoom Webinar & Teleconference

### **Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Mission**

“To work together to ensure the long term conservation of the Western Arctic caribou herd and the ecosystem on which it depends, and to maintain traditional and other uses for the benefit of all people now and in the future.”

### **Agenda**

#### **1:00 Call to Order (15 min)**

- Video (Zoom) & Teleconference Logistics
- WACH Working Group Roll Call / New WG Member Approvals / Quorum
- Review & Approve Agenda

#### **1:15 Western Arctic Caribou Herd Status & Management Level (85 min)**

- 1:15 Western Arctic Herd Overview and 2021 Census – including Technical Committee recommendation on the herd Management Level per the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan (30 min) – Alex Hansen, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) (p. 13)
- 1:45 National Park Service Caribou Monitoring (10 min) – Kyle Joly, National Park Service (NPS) (p. 23)
- 1:55 Western Arctic Herd Registration Permits (15 min) – Alex Hansen, ADFG (p. 33)
- 2:10 Working Group discussion and decision on herd Management Level per the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan (30 min)

#### **2:40 State of Alaska Wildlife Harvest Regulations (15 min)**

- Statewide proposal 245 to eliminate requirement to salvage rib meat on the bone for caribou (includes Units 23 and 24) – Comments due to Alaska Board of Game on February 18, 2022 (p. 43)
- Working Group discussion & decision re: comment to Board of Game

#### **2:55 Break (15 min)**

#### **3:10 Federal Wildlife Harvest Regulations (40 min) – Lisa Grediagin and Hannah Voorhees, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management (OSM)**

- Proposal WP22-47: Proposal to allow calf harvest on federal lands in Unit 22. (NOTE: This proposal was submitted to the FSB (FSB) by the WACH Working Group) (p. 45)

- Wildlife Closure Review WCR22-45: FSB review of whether to retain current closure of portions of Unit 23 along the Noatak River to harvest of caribou by non-Federally qualified users. (p. 47)
- Wildlife Special Action WSA 21-01: OSM discussion with Working Group members about proposed special action to close Federal public lands in Units 23 and 26A to harvest of caribou (and moose) by non-Federally qualified users. (NOTE: The FSB deferred action on this special action request in 2021 and will reconsider prior to the 2022 hunting season.) (p. 49)
- Working Group discussion & decisions re: comments to FSB

**3:50 Working Group Committee Reports (40 min)**

- Resource Development Committee Update (30 min) – Tim Fullman, Committee Chair (p. 65)
- Communication Committee Report & Questionnaire (10 min) – Heather Jameson, ADFG (p. 83)

**4:30 Community Harvest Assessment Program (10 min) – Helen Cold, ADFG Subsistence Division (p. 97)**

**4:40 Announcements / Business Meeting (50 min)**

- Conference Announcement: 2023 North American Caribou Workshop, to be held in Alaska – Kyle Joly, NPS (p. 105)
- Caribou Roundtable Form – Please complete and mail in!
- Approve 2020 WACH Working Group Meeting Summary (p. 107)
- Nominations for Vice Chair for 2022-2024 term (ballot to be mailed later to WG members to vote via mail)
- Action Items
- 2022 Working Group meeting – Date / Location

**5:30 Adjourn**

## Motions Acted Upon at WACH Working Group Meeting

December 15, 2021

1. Membership Approvals: MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Tim Fullman, to approve the following primary and alternate members to the WACH Working Group – Seat 2 primary Vida Coaltrain, alternate Raymond Lee, Jr.; Seat 14 alternate Alex Johnson; Seat 15 alternate Alfred Ningeulook; and Seat 18 primary Brad Saalsaa, alternate Brian Alberts. Motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.
2. Agenda Approval: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Mickey Stickman to approve meeting agenda. Motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.
3. WACH Management Level, 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan: MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Tom Gray, to set the Management Level for the Western Arctic Herd at Preservative, Declining per the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan, Table 1. Motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.
4. Proposed reduction in cow harvest: MOTION by Charlie Lean, second by Neil DeWitt, to adopt a resolution to limit the harvest of cows in the Western Arctic Herd to no more than 25% of the total caribou harvest, through an individual quota, or a community quota, or a permit. Motion failed on a roll call vote. Yes: 7 votes; No: 8 votes.
5. State Proposal 245: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Jake Jacobson, in favor of proposal 245. Motion failed unanimously on a voice vote.
6. Federal Proposal WP22-47: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Dave Kilbourn, to submit comment to the FSB in support of WP22-47. Motion passed on a roll call vote. Yes: 15 votes; No: 2 votes.
7. Federal Wildlife Closure Review WP22-45: MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comment to the FSB in support of WCR22-45. Motion passed on a roll call vote. Yes: 12 votes; No: 4 votes; Abstention: 1.
8. Federal Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01: MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comment to the FSB in support of Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01 (related to both caribou and moose). Motion failed on a roll call vote. Yes: 3 votes; No: 11 votes.
9. Letter to Ambler Metals Regarding Stopping Operations to Avoid Impacts to Caribou: MOTION by Caroline Cannon, second by Cyrus Harris, to send a letter to Ambler Metals asking that they shut down operations at Bornite when there are five or more caribou within five miles of the operation. Motion passed on a roll call vote: 13 Yes votes; 3 No votes.
10. 2020 WACH Working Group Meeting Summary: MOTION by Morris Nassuk, second by Mickey Stickman, to approve the 2020 WACH WG meeting summary. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.
11. Election of Vice Chair: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Caroline Cannon, to nominate Cyrus Harris to serve as Vice Chair of the WACH Working Group for 2022-2024 and asked for unanimous consent. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.
12. Adjournment: MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

## Assignments Made at WACH Working Group Meeting

December 15, 2021

1. State Wildlife Regulation Proposal: Jan Caulfield will draft a letter to the Board of Game, for the Chair's signature, providing the Working Group's comment opposing Proposal 245.
2. Federal Wildlife Regulation Proposals: Jan Caulfield will draft a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board, for the Chair's signature, providing the Working Group's comments on WP22-47, WCR22-45, and WSA21-01.
3. Ambler Metals – Caribou Mitigation Policy: Jan Caulfield will work with Resource Development Chair Tim Fullman to draft a letter to Ambler Metals, for the Chair's signature, requesting that Ambler Metals change their caribou mitigation policy to shut down operations at Bornite when there are five or more caribou within five miles of the operation, in accordance with the motions/votes above. Copy the letter to NANA Corporation.
4. North American Caribou Workshop – 2023: Kyle Joly, NPS, will coordinate with the following WACH Working Group members, who indicated that they would like to be involved in planning for the conference: Vern Cleveland, Cyrus Harris, Tom Gray, Jake Jacobson, Neil DeWitt, Morris Nassuk, Mickey Stickman, and Wanda Kippi.

## Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Caribou Roundtable Questionnaire Responses – 2021

The December 15, 2021 Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group meeting was held via webinar / teleconference. Working Group members were asked to complete the Caribou Roundtable Questionnaire form and send it in to the facilitator. The following are responses received from Working Group members through February 2, 2022. Responses will also be entered into the Caribou Roundtable database from 2011-2021 that is posted on the group's website, <https://westernarcticcaribou.net/> (“N/A” indicates no response provided to a question.)

### **Kotzebue Sound / Game Management Unit 23**

Working Group members: Cyrus Harris (Kotzebue), Billy Bernhardt (Kobuk), Jake Jacobson (Unit 23 guide – seasonal knowledge, Aug.-Sept.), David Kilbourn (Mauneluk River – seasonal knowledge, June-Sept.)

#### **Weather/Physical Environment**

**1. When did freeze-up occur [in 2021]? How does this compare with past years? How about the first snowfall? How about break-up?**

- Cyrus – Freeze-up in time compared to other years. Late October – early November.
- Bill – Freeze-up for the last ten years are later. We got lots of snow. Break-up is normal.
- Jake – August 29-Sept. 23 – Very wet, dismal days and overcast weather.
- David – N/A

**2. What did you notice about snow depth and icing?**

- Cyrus – Little snow early on
- Bill – Deep snow. No rain this fall before snow, [which] might be why so many caribou are wintering here.
- Jake – 6” of snow on Sept. 22.
- David – N/A

**3. What were winds like in winter? In summer?**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – Typical storms. Not much west wind last summer.
- Jake – Winds light during time I was in camp.
- David – Summer winds normal.

**4. Has there been any unusual weather this year (2021)? If so, what kind? (For example, strong winds, storms, much/little rain or snow, etc.)**

- Cyrus – Strong winds. Back-to-back snowstorms in late December.
- Bill – It's all good.
- Jake – Aug 29 - Sept 23, 2021: Nothing unusual.
- David – August 2021 was extremely wet, with some flooding.

**5. Has there been anything else noteworthy this year regarding the air, rivers and lakes, or land? (For example, occurrences of fire that may have impacted caribou range, good/poor vegetation growth, late/early freeze, erosion, etc.)**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – No

- Jake – N/A
- David – No

### **Caribou**

**6. When were caribou present in your area? When did they first arrive? When were they last seen? How does this compare with past years?**

- Cyrus – Late November, early December. No caribou crossed the Red Dog road soon enough.
- Bill – First part of October to present. There are thousands out there. Last few years they've been wintering in the Upper Kobuk.
- Jake – I arrived at my camp on 8-30-21 and departed 9-23-21. We saw caribou intermittently for 24 days, but fewer than usual.
- David – August- numerous tracks in area, estimate 25-50 caribou

**7. How many caribou were in your area? What was the composition of the herd like (calves, males/females)? How does this compare with past years?**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – Lots of caribou. I don't know a small bull from a big cow. The caribou are back.
- Jake – Far fewer were in my area (Trail Creek) than normal. Composition was primarily bulls.
- David – Rarely seen in August in area. None observed in September in past 20 years.

**8. If you harvested caribou, how did the meat and skins compare with past years? What did you notice about fat? Parasites?**

- Cyrus – Low number caught early winter. Good shape although lean.
- Bill – A lot of snow up here. Still, they are in good shape.
- Jake – Normal fat meat. Healthy appearing animals. Bulls only.
- David – N/A

**9. Were there any other notable changes regarding caribou compared with past years?**

- Cyrus – Didn't show up during the fall in areas usually hunted
- Bill – They are still caribou.
- Jake – Yes, in 2021 all caribou were going north - usually they come south.
- David – N/A

### **Other Animals**

**10. What did you notice about bears and wolves in your area?**

- Cyrus – More bear than before.
- Bill – Lots of bear and wolves.
- Jake – I saw one to four wolves on 20 out of 24 days in area.
- David – Notable increase in wolf sign. Bears are numerous in area also.

**10-A. How did these predators affect caribou in your area?**

- Cyrus – Kivalina reported bear near Wulik River, which kept the caribou from crossing.
- Bill – Wolves eat lots of caribou. Bears are sleeping.
- Jake – Wolves may have caused caribou to move more faster than usual.
- David – N/A

**11. Have there been any notable changes regarding other animals in your area, compared with past years? (For example, new animals arriving in your area, or animals that you do not see much of any more, or changes in behavior or body condition).**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – The human beings are getting fatter and lazier.
- Jake – N/A
- David – Moose populations seem to be stable to declining.

**Other Comments**

**12. How do people in the communities use caribou, other than for meat (e.g. clothing)?**

- Cyrus – Same as before, many use for skin.
- Bill – Mattress
- Jake – We use the meat.
- David – N/A

**13. What types of recent exploration and development or other activity have you noticed in the region that may be impacting caribou?**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – None
- Jake – N/A
- David – None

**14. What have you noticed regarding any conflicts between local and non-local hunting in the area of your community? Do you have suggestions for how to reduce conflicts?**

- Cyrus – Close off all sport hunting [to reduce conflicts].
- Bill – No conflicts
- Jake – N/A
- David – No conflicts – have observed local hunters taking illegal (cow) moose

**15. Is there anything else that you have seen this year that you would like to mention?**

- Cyrus – N/A
- Bill – No
- Jake – No
- David – N/A

## **Koyukuk & Middle Yukon Region**

Working Group member: Pollock Simon, Sr. (Allakaket), Mickey Stickman (Nulato)

### **Weather/Physical Environment**

- 1. When did freeze-up occur? How does this compare with past years? How about the first snowfall? How about break-up?**
  - Pollock – The freeze-up is about a month later and break-up is early too. The first snowfall is later too.
  - Mickey – Late freeze up, no snow.
  
- 2. What did you notice about snow depth and icing?**
  - Pollock – Sometimes it's too warm during [winter] and sometimes it rains - then there's ice on snow. Tough going for animals and people.
  - Mickey – No snow.
  
- 3. What were winds like in winter? In summer?**
  - Pollock – We don't get much wind.
  - Mickey – Strong winds, blew over the ballfield stands.
  
- 4. Has there been any unusual weather this year? If so, what kind? (For example, strong winds, storms, much/little rain or snow, etc.)**
  - Pollock – Not much wind, but we get lots of rain in August. More snow storms in winter.
  - Mickey – Late snow. Late freeze up. Winds strong enough to break healthy spruce trees.
  
- 5. Has there been anything else noteworthy this year regarding the air, rivers and lakes, or land? (For example, occurrences of fire that may have impacted caribou range, good/poor vegetation growth, late/early freeze, erosion, etc.)**
  - Pollock – There is more bank erosion. It has been cold in spring and we don't get many blueberries.
  - Mickey – Forest and tundra fires will deter them if it happens on their annual migration.

### **Caribou**

- 6. When were caribou present in your area? When did they first arrive? When were they last seen? How does this compare with past years?**
  - Pollock – Before 1974 there were lots caribou just a few miles from Allakaket. Then, the oil pipeline start the [Haul] road up north. The caribou didn't come back after that.
  - Mickey – Last time was in 1993, a small portion of the herd came back to Nulato and Koyukuk Villages and that was the last time we saw caribou.
  
- 7. How many caribou were in your area? What was the composition of the herd like (calves, males/females)? How does this compare with past years?**
  - Pollock – There is no caribou for 40 years now.
  - Mickey – None

**8. If you harvested caribou, how did the meat and skins compare with past years? What did you notice about fat? Parasites?**

- Pollock – No caribou.
- Mickey – None

**9. Were there any other notable changes regarding caribou compared with past years?**

- Pollock – No caribou.
- Mickey – Only climate change and forest fires affect the migration.

**Other Animals**

**10. What did you notice about bears and wolves in your area?**

- Pollock – There are more grizzly bears present. Not too [many] wolves now.
- Mickey – We have more brown bears in our area. Wolves are trapped and harvested by local hunters and trappers.

**10-A How did these predators affect caribou in your area?**

- Pollock – The predators are killing moose now. No caribou in our area.
- Mickey – Do not know

**11. Have there been any notable changes regarding other animals in your area, compared with past years? (For example, new animals arriving in your area, or animals that you do not see much of any more, or changes in behavior or body condition).**

- Pollock – No caribou, but moose numbers are low also. The grizzly bear kill moose in our area.
- Mickey – No fish for the last couple years.

**Other Comments**

**12. How do people in the communities use caribou, other than for meat (e.g. clothing)?**

- Pollock – We make scrapers out of the leg bones.
- Mickey – Both clothing and caribou skin boots. We trade, or used to trade, salmon for caribou skin mukluks.

**13. What types of recent exploration and development or other activity have you noticed in the region that may be impacting caribou?**

- Pollock – In 1974 they put in the gravel road for the oil pipeline. Now they are talking about the Ambler Road. All the roads will impact the caribou movement. I don't like the roads.
- Mickey – Not sure, but I'm sure the proposed Ambler Road will impact vital areas of salmon spawning grounds.

**14. What have you noticed regarding any conflicts between local and non-local hunting in the area of your community? Do you have suggestions for how to reduce conflicts?**

- Pollock – In Allakaket, in upper Koyukuk River, there is no more salmon, low numbers of moose and no caribou. We can't afford to compete with sport hunters in hunting, fishing and trapping.
- Mickey – None, just a general dislike of trophy rack hunters by local subsistence users and local landowners.

**15. Is there anything else that you have seen this year that you would like to mention?**

- Pollock – People will come up the new road, not to look at the mountains, but they might hunt, trap and fish around our villages. There is already low numbers of fish and wildlife resource in our area.

## **Seward Peninsula Region**

Working Group members: Elmer Seetot, Jr. (Brevig Mission), Charlie Lean (Nome), Morris Nassuk (Koyuk)

### **Weather/Physical Environment**

- 1. When did freeze-up occur? How does this compare with past years? How about the first snowfall? How about break-up?**
  - Elmer – Freeze up in mid November – Port Clarence Bay started to freeze up with early snow conditions providing a base for snowmachine travel. Very cold temperatures.
  - Charlie – We are having an old time early winter, like 2012 or in the 1980-2000 time frame! Sea ice has covered the Bering Sea and north since Thanksgiving.
  - Morris – Freeze-up in October, which is pretty much same as past years. First snowfall in December.
  
- 2. What did you notice about snow depth and icing?**
  - Elmer – Drifting snow didn't occur until late February-April.
  - Charlie – Light snow cover; not much icing. We had a week of icing weather as freeze-up occurred but it has sublimated away.
  - Morris – Came later in March.
  
- 3. What were winds like in winter? In summer?**
  - Elmer – Late winter snow with cooler temperatures. Rain and onshore winds dominated the weather. High pressure around mid May to early July
  - Charlie – Winds normal. Wet summer. Tundra was moist/wet until freeze-up. Lots of salmonberries.
  - Morris – Windy
  
- 4. Has there been any unusual weather this year? If so, what kind? (For example, strong winds, storms, much/little rain or snow, etc.)**
  - Elmer – Early snowfall and sticking or staying on the ground is good snow base. Low pressure systems throughout late ... (?)
  - Charlie – Temperatures cooler than past decade.
  - Morris – Windy and rainy.
  
- 5. Has there been anything else noteworthy this year regarding the air, rivers and lakes, or land? (For example, occurrences of fire that may have impacted caribou range, good/poor vegetation growth, late/early freeze, erosion, etc.)**
  - Elmer – N/A
  - Charlie – Rainy cool summer.
  - Morris – No

### **Caribou**

- 6. When were caribou present in your area? When did they first arrive? When were they last seen? How does this compare with past years?**
  - Elmer – Hunters went up side of the American River and noted that caribou were present. Lack of snow prevented hunters from harvesting caribou earlier. Caribou sightings in the mountains north of Brevig were reported throughout the summer. Winter harvest of caribou was mostly on the north side of the Seward Peninsula (Ear Mountain area)

- Charlie – Only resident herds were available. Those near Mount Bendeleben and those near Serpentine Springs/Midnite Mountain. The migratory animals have not been [in the area] for a couple years.
- Morris – Twenty years ago. That year was the last year. Sad none are around.

**7. How many caribou were in your area? What was the composition of the herd like (calves, males/females)? How does this compare with past years?**

- Elmer – Hard to estimate the number of caribou in the York Mountains (NW KTS), but caribou were present on the northern side. Many of them were males and it was a first for me to see them on this south side of the Seward Peninsula.
- Charlie – There are a couple hundred in two locations. Occasionally a few reindeer are taken from private herds.
- Morris – Not as many as before. It is hard to do the numbers. It was mostly bulls. No comparison.

**8. If you harvested caribou, how did the meat and skins compare with past years? What did you notice about fat? Parasites?**

- Elmer – Like male caribou, fat was starting to gather in and around meat (ribs, hind). Though skins are holey from warble flies; they are used for sled cushions for transporting boats in spring by sled. Lots of warbles between skin and body back.
- Charlie – N/A
- Morris – Pretty much the same. Did find some parasites.

**9. Were there any other notable changes regarding caribou compared with past years?**

- Elmer – Being seen more often this side of the Seward Peninsula.
- Charlie – N/A
- Morris – They didn't come into this area (Koyuk).

**Other Animals**

**10. What did you notice about bears and wolves in your area?**

- Elmer – Bear sightings around a 5 mile radius of Brevig. Wolves were probably near the caribou around the Serpentine and Goodhope Rivers, north of the Lava Beds.
- Charlie – Bears in Unit 22C are reduced in number due to the bear season being more liberal. Wolves are present on the Kuzitrin River mostly.
- Morris – Too many of each.

**10-A. How did these predators affect caribou in your area?**

- Elmer – Caribou were at good feeding areas and not many caribou were present where we usually harvest them.
- Charlie – Moose, muskox, and salmon are all alternative prey that support bears and wolves. We had a terrible salmon season so bears may be affected.
- Morris – Not clear.

**11. Have there been any notable changes regarding other animals in your area, compared with past years? (For example, new animals arriving in your area, or animals that you do not see much of any more, or changes in behavior or body condition).**

- Elmer – N/A
- Charlie – Red squirrels are colonizing the Central Seward Peninsula, from Nome to Kuzitrin River.
- Morris – None that I noticed.

## **Other Comments**

### **12. How do people in the communities use caribou, other than for meat (e.g. clothing)?**

- Elmer – Skins for sleeping mats that are harvested in early winter.
- Charlie – Skins for winter camping or sled pads.
- Morris – Soup, roast, fry, Quaq (frozen meat)!

### **13. What types of recent exploration and development or other activity have you noticed in the region that may be impacting caribou?**

- Elmer – N/A
- Charlie – Graphite One project is ramping up. The plan has a new road through Mosquito Pass, which is reindeer summer range.
- Morris – None

### **14. What have you noticed regarding any conflicts between local and non-local hunting in the area of your community? Do you have suggestions for how to reduce conflicts?**

- Elmer – None observed even though there is a local herder who has reindeer around our vicinity.
- Charlie – Some user conflicts related to moose hunting - season and permits are issued locally.
- Morris – None

### **15. Is there anything else that you have seen this year that you would like to mention?**

- Elmer – Cold weather snap like in the mid 1950's to 1960's. Seabirds dying and washing up on the beach with lack of salmon and lots of wet weather during fishing. Need to monitor feeding and migration routes for food availability.
- Charlie – Very short moose season – two to four days in road accessible areas. Salmon was weak - limited subsistence harvests, too wet to dry fish.
- Morris – No

## **North Slope Region**

As of February 2, 2022, no Caribou Roundtable responses were yet received from Working Group members with knowledge of the North Slope Region.