

**Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group  
FINAL – 2023 Meeting Summary**

**December 13-14, 2023**

Downtown Marriott Hotel, 820 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Ave, Anchorage

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group (WG) met in person on December 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (see agenda at the end of this document). The following is a summary of meeting presentations and Working Group member discussions. Motions passed at the meeting pages 15-16. 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 8:30 a.m.

**A. WACH WG Roll Call / Establish Quorum** – Quorum was met with 15 of 20 WG members present at 8:30 am on Day 1. 15 of 20 members were present on Day 2. 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
3. Anaktuvuk Pass, Nuiqsut.....	Mary Hugo (not present)
4. Elim, Golovin, White Mountain.....	Morris Nakaruk (not present, alternate)
5. Fairbanks Hunters .....	John Wisniewski
6. Hunting Guides.....	Jake Jacobson
7. Kivalina, Noatak .....	Daniel Foster, Sr. (not present)
8. Kotzebue .....	Cyrus Harris (Vice Chair)
9. Koyukuk River.....	Darrell Vent
10. Lower Kobuk River .....	Vern Cleveland, Sr. (Chair)
11. Middle Yukon River .....	Michael Stickman
12. Point Hope and Point Lay.....	Steve Oomittuk (not present)
13. Nome.....	Charlie Lean
14. Conservationists.....	Tim Fullman
15. Northern Seward Peninsula .....	Johnson Eningowuk (alternate)
16. Reindeer Herders Association.....	Tom Gray
17. Southern Seward Peninsula .....	Morris Nassuk (not present)
18. Transporters.....	Ben Child (alternate)
19. Upper Kobuk River .....	Bill Bernhardt
20. Atqasuk, Utqiagvik, Wainwright .....	Joseph Leavitt (alternate)

**MOTION** by Micky Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to approve the following primary and alternate members to the WACH Working Group – Seat 5 primary John Wisniewski; Seat 9 primary Jack Reakoff; Seat 9 alternate Darrell Vent; Seat 20 alternate Joseph Leavitt. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote.

**B. Audience Attendance:** Public and agency attendance was not taken. However, 30+ people were present in the audience, including agency staff that presented information to the Working Group.

- C. **Approve Agenda:** Facilitator Holly Spoth-Torres reviewed the agenda (Attachment 1). MOTION by Cyrus Harris, second by Neil DeWitt, 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 2023 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 2023 WG Binder). The presentation laid the foundation for the WG's later recommendations regarding future management of the caribou herd. Key points in the ADFG presentation included:

- **Herd population declining** – The 2023 photocensus estimated 152,000 caribou in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd which is down from 164,000 in 2022. Census numbers for past years: 2021 – 188,000; 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. Between 2022 and 2023 the herd has declined about 7.5%. We are entering the fourth year below 200,000 animals which is the target for intensive management.
- **Calving (parturition) is below average** – Summer surveys show that 77% of collared cows had calves in 2023, compared with 64% in 2022, 68% in 2021, 67% in 2020, 81% in 2019, 86% in 2018, and 83% in 2017. The long-term average calving rate is 70% (1992-2023). Parturition is up slightly and overall nothing we see here is concerning.
- **Yearling recruitment is average** – Yearling recruitment in 2023 was 17:100 yearlings:adults, which is the same as in 2022 and matches the 25-year average (1998-2022).
- **Fall herd composition:** The bull:cow ratio is 50 bulls for every 100 cows. The management plan states that we should be maintaining a ratio of 30 bulls for every 100 cows – we are well above that and there are no major concerns.
- **Adult cow survival is below average** – Cow survival rate for 2023 was 69%, which is below the long-term average of 81% (1987-2020). Adult cow survival is the primary concern related to the recent population decline. The herd won't see growth unless survival is above 80% and will continue to decline.
- **Cause of mortality** – Primary causes of mortality are predation, (51%) "unknown" (32%), and hunting (17%).
- **Population trend** – Since 2005, the herd has had more years of decline than increase or stability, with cow mortality higher and calf recruitment lower.
- **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 12, 2023, the WACH Technical Committee recommended that the Working Group assign the same management level as 2022, 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%. The Preservative, Declining Management Level recommends a harvest of somewhere between 6000 and 10,000 caribou. 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
  - 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 2023.)

- Recommended Harvest – The recommended harvest rate is 4.8%. 4.8% of 152,000 equals 7,296 caribou, keeping the harvest composition at 70% (5107) bulls and (2189) 30% cows.
- Harvest Strategies – It is critical to limit the harvest of cows. An individual cow, through its lifetime has the potential to produce 52 caribou. If we continue to harvest cows at the same rate, the herd will continue to decline. Nonresident harvest is irrelevant and has little impact on the herd population.
- Recommended Management Actions
  - Net reduction of harvest
    - Cow harvest is the highest priority (no surplus)
    - Bull harvest – maintain healthy bull:cow ration
  - Get accurate harvest data
  - Increase understanding of mortality causes
- Summary – There are significant biological concerns. We are approaching the CRITICAL LEVEL (table 2 of the Management Plan).

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

- Q: Are you monitoring winter grazing?  
A: ADF&G isn’t specifically monitoring winter range selection.
- Comment – We must consider both the bulls and the cows when we are making decisions. Healthy bulls are leaders.
- Comment – Limiting non-federally qualified hunters doesn’t have any impact on the herd numbers.
- Comment – Once we get to population numbers like this, we really need to be thinking about strategies to help the population. We don’t want to see numbers in the early 1970s (75,000). Those were difficult days.
- Q: In the 90s, when the calving rate was low, the herd population still grew. Why is that?  
A: The cow survival rate during that time was much higher.
- Q: Are you working with the federal agencies to ensure there are enough animals for subsistence users?  
A: Yes, we coordinate with our federal partners and using the data we must implement strategies to increase herd numbers.

**National Park Service Caribou Monitoring** – Kyle Joly, NPS, presented information on the movements of caribou the NPS has collared (see p. 22 in WG Binder). Points from the presentation:

- WAH Collar Results (Sept 2022 – Aug 2023) – 56 GPS collars were deployed. This was a record number of collars.
- There is more and more evidence indicating that the Red Dog Mine road is slowing caribou down.
- Fall migration, Kobuk River Crossing – From 2010-2015 over 80% of the collared caribou crossed the Kobuk River to winter farther south. From 2016-2021, an average 37% crossed the Kobuk River, with a low of just 6% of the herd crossing in 2020. In the fall of 2021, 73% of the herd crossed the Kobuk River. However, in the fall of 2022, 21% made it to the Kobuk Valley, another low. There are wild swings in caribou distribution and movement from year to year.
- Over time we know that caribou are crossing the Kobuk almost later than is typical. In 2022 the animals crossed on September 21.
- Overwintering – There has been a dramatic change in recent years in where Western Arctic Herd caribou are wintering, in terms of NPS conservation units in the herd’s range. For the last five winters, no caribou have wintered in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve – while 7 - 8 years

ago 75% of the collared animals wintered there. 65% of collars ended up in Gates of the Arctic, the second highest ever.

- Migration distance – The mean distance of travel by collared caribou from September 2022 - August 2023 was 1,777 miles, which is lower than the previous year and slightly below average.
- Fall Migration, Noatak River Crossing – The distribution of the herd crossing the Noatak was similar to 2022, with 60% crossing in the upper Noatak almost to the Gates of the Arctic boundary. When compared against the average distribution of the herd crossing the Noatak over time, in 2022 none of the herd crossed the very lower Noatak while between 2010 and 2016 an average of 13% crossed the lower Noatak.
- 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 much. In 2023 the herd was crossing the Selawik River on May 2.
- North American Caribou Workshop – Keynote and other important talks are available on the website. <https://westernarcticcaribou.net/contactalaska-fish-game/links/>
- Recent research papers of interest –
  - “Continental synchrony and local responses: Climatic effects on spatiotemporal patterns of calving in a social ungulate” – <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ecs2.4399>
  - “Towards long-term records of rain-on-snow events across the Arctic from satellite data” – <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/detecting-icing-events.htm>

Working Group questions and discussion on the NPS presentation included:

- Q: Does herd size impact migration?  
A: Yes. When a herd is bigger, it needs more space and therefore covers a lot more ground, needing more habitat and migrating farther distances. When the herd decreases, it won't move as far.

**Northern Latitude Herds** – Kyle Joly presented an overview on caribou in northern latitudes. See page 29 of the WG Binder to see key takeaways from the presentation.

**Working Group Decision on Herd Management Level** – The Working Group discussed the recommendation from the Technical Committee that the WACH be within the “Preservative” and “Declining” management category, with regard to Table 1 of the WACH Cooperative Management Plan (p. 21 of the 2019 plan).

Working Group members expressed the following comments in discussion of the herd Management Level:

- With the herd declining we need to act.
- The monitoring of annual harvest is lacking, including of sport hunters.
- Agree with the Technical Committee that Preservative, Declining is the right management category.
- Before we place restrictions on subsistence use, we should first focus on restricting sport hunting, commercial use of the resource. This use creates a lot of air traffic and noise disturbance. We need to act now before the numbers reach the critical range.
- However, we need to remember that sport hunting is such a small percentage of caribou taken. And the industry is important for some villages.

MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Tom Gray, to accept the recommendation by the Technical Committee to set the Management Level for the Western Arctic Herd at “Preservative, Declining” per

the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan, Table 1. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 15; No: 0; Abstain: 0

### **Regulation Change Proposals Under Consideration by the Board of Game and Federal Subsistence**

**Board** – Phil Perry, ADF&G & Will Wiese, USFWS

In 2023, the WACH WG submitted three proposals – one (1) federal wildlife proposal to the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) and two (2) state proposals to the Board of Game (BOG). Phil and Will discussed these proposals as well as additional proposals under consideration by the FSB and BOG that may impact the WACH.

Phil first discussed the BOG process.

BOG is meeting in Kotzebue on Jan 26 – Jan 29, 2024. The meeting is open to the public. The BOG will consider the following proposals for Region 5, which includes Units 22, 23, and 26A. However, the WG proposals included units broader than Region 5 so ADF&G is going to ask the BOG to defer the portion that refers to the other units to their meeting dealing with Interior Units in March, 2024.

**BOG Proposal 2** – (WG proposal) 4/person only one cow, all units in the range

Discussion and questions:

- 4 animals per person is enough for people.
- Q: Under our proposals are proxy hunts still allowed?  
A: Yes.

MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group’s proposal (BOG Proposal 2) to the Board of Game to change harvest regulations to 4 caribou per person per year only one of which can be a cow. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 14; No: 1; Abstain: 0

Assignment: Holly Spoth-Torres will submit a comment to the Alaska Board of Game on behalf of the Working Group reaffirming the harvest reduction proposal submitted in 2023.

**BOG Proposal 3** – (WG proposal) Close NR hunting range-wide

Discussion and questions:

- Most non-resident hunters want bulls.
- There is a stronger desire by non-resident hunters to keep the meat. Transporters ensure that non-resident hunters are following the laws and regulations which they are responsible for following. Transporters work with the troopers to ensure that all rules are being followed.
- Non-resident hunters also provide a benefit to the state and the regions they hunt. Their fees go toward research and data collection.
- This is an ‘all hands on deck’ situation to preserve the herd. This is a joint effort between resident and non-resident hunters. Maybe we should look at a formal rubric for non-resident hunters, like proposal 5, rather than a complete closure.
- Q: What percentage of animals taken are by non-residents?  
A: Historically, it is 5% or less of the harvestable surplus. Last year 85-90 animals taken. Currently, the harvest of cows by non-resident hunters is 3-5 individuals.

MOTION by Darrell Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group’s proposal (BOG Proposal 5) to the Board of Game to close caribou hunting to non-residents range-wide. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 9; No: 6; Abstain: 0

Assignment: Holly Spoth-Torres will submit a comment to the Alaska Board of Game on behalf of the Working Group reaffirming the proposal submitted in 2023 to close caribou hunting to non-residents in the range of the WAH.

Proposal 4 – Align U23 (Pt Hope) with 26A submitted by the North Slope F&G Advisory Committee.

Discussion and questions:

- This is out of our jurisdiction so we should remain silent on this. The BOG needs to make their decision. We've submitted our proposals (Proposal 2 and 3).

MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Tim Fullman, to take no action on Proposal 4 with unanimous consent. Motion FAILED.

Proposal 5 – Reduce resident harvest to 5/person, only 1 cow and create a NR registration permit for 400 hunters.

Discussion and questions:

- A NR registration might be a good way to limit NR use without a complete closure. Some WG members like this compromise. We should consider proposing an adjustment to the proposal of a NR permit of 400 hunters. Maybe find a compromise somewhere between 0 and 400.
- We supported a resolution supporting reductions for residents to 4 animals and this proposal is 5 animals.
- Yesterday we voted to reaffirm proposals 2 and 3. That's our position.

MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrel Vent, to take no action on Proposal 5. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 13; No: 1.

Proposal 18 – Open 22A for caribou harvest.

Discussion and questions:

- There's too much confusion about caribou vs reindeer. Reindeer herders have authorized ranges, and this would potentially allow hunters to mistake reindeer for caribou.

MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to oppose Proposal 18. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 3.

Federal Proposal 24-28 – 4 caribou/year, only one may be a cow throughout WACH range

Discussion and questions:

- We need to stand by our proposal 24-28 that covers the entire range of the WACH.
- The North Slope is indicating that they need more caribou than this proposal.

MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group's proposal (FSB 24-28) to the Federal Subsistence Board to change harvest regulations to 4 caribou per person per year only one of which can be a cow. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 13; No: 1; Abstain: 0

Federal Proposal 24-29 – 4 caribou/year, only one may be a cow, Unit 23 Only, submitted by the Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council

Discussion and questions:

- We included Unit 23 in our proposal because we wanted to state that our proposal should cover all the units that the Western Arctic Herd travels.
- We need to stand by our proposal 24-28.

- We should support our original proposal and leave it up to the FSB to carve out specific units if they wish.

Federal Proposal 24-30/31 – No non-federally qualified hunters for caribou August 1 to October 31 in Unit 23

Discussion and questions:

- There is currently a temporary closure in place.
- These are federal public lands, and this restricts access to them.
- Everyone needs to be involved in the preservation of the herd, not just subsistence users.
- A permanent closure might do more harm than good because it forces people to go elsewhere off public land for the caribou and might concentrate an impact on the herd.

MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Cyrus Harris, to support Federal Proposal 24-30/31. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 10; No: 4; Abstain: 0

Assignment: Holly Spoth-Torres will submit a comment to the Federal Subsistence Board on behalf of the Working Group reaffirming support of Federal Proposal 24-28 and supporting Federal Proposal 24-30/31.

### **III. Resource Development in the Herd's Range**

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. 61 in WG Binder). Tim's role as the Resource Development Committee Chair is to keep an eye on development proposals in the range of the herd and assist the working group in drafting and submitting comments on these developments as appropriate.

Ambler Road Project (p. 62 in WG Binder)

- In 2020 the BLM approved permitting of an Ambler access road.
- Two lawsuits were filed requiring the BLM to complete a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.
- The BLM was then required to go back and fix some of the deficiencies in the original EIS.
- In October of 2023 the BLM released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement which looked at the same three alternatives for different roads to the Ambler District. The BLM also added another alternative (skip pioneer road and directly to a single lane road).
- Another change – BLM considered public access and trespass on the road as reasonably foreseeable.
- The DSEIS also proposes approving the road.
- The DSEIS acknowledges disturbances to caribou.
- We need to submit comments by December 22, 2023.
- Tim has drafted comments for your review for consideration at our business meeting (p. 66 in Binder).

D1 Land Withdrawal (p. 80 in WG Binder)

- The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) withdrew nearly 50 million acres of land from mineral and energy development to allow protection for the public interest.
- BLM is considering opening 28 million of these acres for development.
- Lands include calving grounds, summer range of the herd, and others.

- There will be an opportunity to comment this month or next month on what we believe the impact of development will be on the WAH.
- Could lead to loss of subsistence priority.

NPR-A Special Areas Rulemaking (p. 82 in WG Binder)

- The strongest protections for wildlife, habitat, and subsistence in the NPR-A occur within designated “Special Areas,” including the Utukok River Uplands Special Area that protects much of the WACH calving grounds.
- After direction at our last meeting, we submitted comments suggesting to raise the northern boundary of the calving area for protection of the WACH.
- Should have a final ruling in March of 2024.
- The Alaska Delegation is very interested in this development, but concerns have been raised about impacts to subsistence from Brevig Mission and Teller residents, though opinions are mixed.

Graphite One Mine (p. 90 in WG Binder)

- The Graphite One project is a proposed graphite mine on the Seward Peninsula between Brevig Mission, Teller, and Nome.
- Largest known graphite deposit in the nation, which is important for lithium batteries. There is interest in a domestic source for graphite because almost all of the world’s high-quality graphite comes from China.
- There is not yet an opportunity for public comment, but the Working Group will pay attention to the project moving forward.

ASTAC Fiber Optic Project (p. 92 in WG Binder)

- Arctic Slope Telephone Association Cooperative, Inc. (ASTAC) provides telecommunications, including internet access, for North Slope communities. They recently received Federal grants to connect Anaktuvuk Pass, Nuiqsut, and Point Lay with high-speed fiber optic broadband.
- Not a lot of details have been made public, but at least for Anaktuvuk Pass the plan seems to be to lay undersea cable on the tundra and wait for it to sink down out of sight. They are hoping to do construction in 2024 and 2025 with service available starting in 2025.
- It is not clear what opportunities there are for public comment but if this is of interest to the Working Group we can try to engage further.

Annarraaq – Aktigiruaq Mining Exploration (p. 93 in WG Binder)

- The Annarraaq-Aktigiruaq mining exploration project would evaluate the potential of new mineral deposits north of the current Red Dog Mine (see map above). The Working Group commented multiple times on the Teck America Inc. proposal.
- The Army Corps of Engineers has not yet made a decision about the application and is still working on the Section 106 process, including going through a new cultural study.
- No new opportunities for comment.

Willow Master Development Plan (p. 89 in WG Binder)

- This project would expand infrastructure in the northeastern part of the National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska, or the NPR-A. Oil and gas development would move further westward and move up

further north to the edge of the Teshekpuk Lake special area, which protects critical calving, post calving and insect relief habitat for the Teshekpuk caribou herd. This project was initially approved back in 2020, but like Ambler, there was a legal ruling that halted that development and led to a supplemental environmental impact statement analysis.

- The Willow Project is not one that the Working Group has commented on in the past because it primarily would impact the Teshekpuk Herd, not the Western Arctic Herd, but since the two herds tend to be managed similarly, and given some of the recent patterns of winter use by the Western Herd where many animals have stayed up on the North Slope, this is a project we should track.
- The Willow project underwent multiple revisions and legal battles but was ultimately approved by BLM in March 2023.

#### Noatak – Red Dog Road - Planning and Environmental Linkage (p. 95 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). A Noatak Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study was initiated to consider project options. In 2020, the Working Group submitted a letter to DOT&PF relevant to minimizing impacts to the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds.
- It appears that DOT&PF has made little progress on the Noatak PEL as the website appears to have been removed.

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

- Q: Are the OTZ towers being placed on the highest spots possible? Caribou also go to the high spots.  
A: Generally, towers are placed on high points. They are usually about 30 miles apart and need to be connected by line of sight.
- Q: Are the OTZ tower construction require road access?  
A: Materials will be flown in by helicopter.
- Comment: Regarding the D-1 withdrawal, I believe that the State of Alaska has over-selected lands.

#### **IV. Ambler Road Project**

Geoff Beyersdorf, BLM District Manager in the Fairbanks District Office presented information to the Working Group about the status of the Ambler Road project (p. 96 in WG Binder).

- AIDEA is the applicant requesting the right-of-way for the project.
- AIDEA has proposed to construct, operate, maintain, and eventually remove an all season, industrial access-only road from the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mining District. The project would include construction of bridges, material sites, maintenance stations, airstrips, and related features.
- BLM is required to respond to AIDEA's permit application requesting a right-of-way for the project. BLM is the lead federal agency for the Supplemental EIS and the subsistence analysis required by ANILCA Section 810, and for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act..
- The BLM must decide if a ROW will be granted and, if so, the terms and conditions that will be imposed.

#### Key Milestones – Starting in 2020

- Right-of-Way application filed by AIDEA in June 2016.
- Joint Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in July 2020 approving Alternative A (AIDEA’s proposed action).
- NAEC et. al., lawsuit filed August 2020.
- TCC et. al., lawsuit filed October 2020.
- BLM issued ROW grant in January 2021.
- DOI filed motion for voluntary remand of decisions made in the Joint ROD – February 2022.
  - Motion cited perceived deficiencies in the ANILCA 810 analysis and perceived lack of consultation associated with development of the PA for the Section 106 process.
  - Motion requested to the agencies to allow for “reconsideration through the administrative process.” [read: Supplemental EIS].
- Deputy Secretary suspended AIDEA’s ROW grant – March 2022.
- Court granted motion for voluntary remand of decisions in the JROD – May 2022.
- BLM published NOI to prepare SEIS with a 45-day comment period/scoping process in September 2022.
- BLM published the Notice of Availability for the Draft SEIS beginning a 60-day public comment period ending on December 22, 2023.

There are 4 alternatives on the table. BLM doesn’t have a preferred alternative. (See map on page 97.) AIDEA’s proposed alternative is Alternative A.

#### What is the SEIS?

- A Supplemental EIS is a document that is prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when there is substantial new information relevant to environmental concerns that have bearing on the proposed action or its effects.
- This DEIS will build upon the original analysis.
- Includes new data – water, air quality, wetlands, etc.
- Updates proposed mitigation measures.
- The DEIS includes more data on caribou migration.
- DEIS completed a Section 810 of ANILCA analysis. The initial evaluation stated that the project “may significantly restrict subsistence uses” so several subsistence hearings are being held.
- The following factors were considered in the 810 Evaluation including:
  - Abundance of resource
  - Availability of resource
  - Access to resource
  - Importance of the potentially impacted subsistence resource with a community
- The 810 findings were cumulative. Of the 66 communities analyzed, 34 may have significant restrictions to subsistence use (See page 101 of WG binder).
- ANILCA 810 Summary for Alternatives A and B
  - Ambler Road could cause a reduction in the availability of caribou due to:
    - the herd being delayed or deflected by the road.
    - If the lead caribou are disrupted then a majority of the herd could be impacted.
  - Ambler Road could cause population level impacts to the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (a reduction in the abundance) due to:
    - increased energy expenditure

- reduced foraging rates,
- increased winter mortality, and
- decreased breeding success.
- Ambler Road could cause a reduction in the abundance and availability of harvestable fish due to:
  - increased sedimentation and changes in habitat.
- The construction and operation of the road could cause a reduction in access for the communities of: Alatna, Allakaket, Ambler, Bettles, Evansville, Kobuk, and Shugnak.
- Alternative C would be less likely to impact WAH migration, but would cover more of their wintering grounds and therefore has an overall affect on a greater amount of the herd's habitat. The construction and operation of the road could cause a reduction in access for the communities of: Alatna, Allakaket, Ambler, Anaktuvuk Pass, Hughes, Huslia, Kobuk, Selawik, Shungnak, Stevens Village, and Tanana.

#### Opportunities for the WACH Working Group to Participate

- Provide substantive Comments – identify an issues or an idea in the Draft SEIS and explain why it is a problem or how to solve the problem.
- Provide verbal comments at a public hearing.
- Mail or hand-deliver comments.
- Provide comments online.

The following comments and questions were raised in Working Group discussion of the Ambler Road report:

- Comment: All the routes impact the migration patterns.
- Q: Addressed to Tim Fullman. Were all the issues resolved in the DEIS?  
A: Some were addressed, some were not, which is why we will be submitting additional substantive comments on the DEIS.
- Comment: This road will impact caribou numbers.
- Comment: The road will impact our way of life and our way of getting food. We should be using funds to improve villages.
- Q: When will we see the preferred alternative?  
A: The preferred alternative will be in the Final EIS.
- Comment: All the villages on the middle Yukon oppose the road. We need to make decisions based on caribou, but we also need to represent the people we represent.
- Comment: We should support a No Action alternative. This would be the best solution for a subsistence lifestyle.

#### **V. Community Harvest Assessment Program**

Helen Cold, ADFG Subsistence Division, presented to the Working Group explaining the community harvest surveys (caribou focus) that are being conducted in eight communities within the range of the Western Arctic herd (p. 105 in the WG Binder).

- The communities included in the surveys: Golovin, Selawik, Shungnak, White Mountain, Shishmaref, Noatak, Deering and Kobuk.
- Methods include household surveys, ethnographic interviews with mapping, and participant observation.

- Funding Agency: US Fish and Wildlife Service
  - Research partnership among 8 study communities, ADF&G Subsistence, ADF&G Department of Wildlife Conservation
- The project started in 2019 and will continue through 2024.

## VI. North Slope Caribou Harvest

Brian Person, Senior Wildlife Biologist with the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management presented data and information about caribou harvest in communities on the North Slope within the range of the Western Arctic Herd. (Report begins on page 122 of the WG binder)

- Methods for estimating caribou harvest in North Slope communities within the range of the Western Arctic Herd (WAH)
- Results of community harvest data from households were surveyed in the communities of Anaktuvuk Pass (average 815/year), Point Hope (466/year), Point Lay (501/year), Wainwright (1193/year), Atkasuk (191/year), and Utqiagvik (4138/year) ~ between 2014-2021
- Methods used in a spatial analysis that assigns harvest to the WAH and Teshekpuk herd (TCH) between 2016-2021 when harvest data were available (SPATIAL ANALYSIS)
- Preliminary results on the proportion of caribou harvest from the WAH and TCH for each community

The following comments and questions were raised in Working Group discussion of this report:

- Comment: This information complements the actions we took yesterday. Thank you.  
Response from Brian: The most important thing to do is communicate proposals so that communities aren't blind-sided.
- Q: Do you know the bull::cow ratio?  
A: Yes, we are collecting this information from the communities as well.

## VII. Fate of the Caribou Project

Dr. Elie Gurarie, from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, presented on the Fate of the Caribou Project. See the presentation on page 134 of the WG binder.

- Received funding to study the impacts of a changing Arctic on caribou movements.
- Showed impact on caribou movements of a winter road to diamond mines in Canada.
- A relevant story map link shared:  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8aeec00de1454358a6dfed6ddbc24441>
- Building a knowledge database, compiling knowledge of the caribou.
- Dr. Gurarie would like to consult with you on how to use this information. They are guided by ethical principles of sharing and collecting data.
- We are submitting a proposal to the NSF to fund this work and are requesting a letter of support.

The following comments and questions were raised in Working Group discussion of this report:

- Comment: We should have lots of researchers involved in this group.
- Q: Is the letter of support for all of this or just for the NSF proposal?  
A: Just for the NSF proposal.
- Q: Can I learn more about the acoustic monitoring? This could be helpful to help make decisions about what is really impacting caribou.

A: Acoustic monitoring is very non-invasive and we can analyze insects, aircrafts, blasting, etc. The goal is to put devices on caribou collars so we can tell what is really impacting their movements.

### **VIII. Communication Committee Update**

Brittany Sweeney, FWS Outreach Specialist for the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge and a member of the Communications Committee, briefly presented information about the actions of the committee during the past year. For details, please refer to pages 144 of the binder.

Brittany led a brainstorming session about ideas for content for the 2024 Caribou Trails newsletter, which gets mailed to everyone in the range of the herd. Ideas/topics discussed include:

- The FSB and the BOG actions taken on the proposals.
- The caribou numbers are declining, and everyone needs to play a role in helping reduce the harvest – especially cows.
- Maybe some information about how other herds are also in decline.
- Print a section that reaches out to the public to ask for comments/information. Include contact information for who to contact.
- Include information on predators.
- Include lots of graphics – maybe about how many offspring one cow produces over time.
- Side by side maps of the caribou in abundance and the caribou in decline.
- Continue to share information about development projects in the herd's range.
- Info on climate change and how it is impacting caribou.
- Info about how transporters are working with agencies and their hunting is being monitored.
- Not all bulls are equal.
- How caribou are being impacted by road traffic-how the caribou have not acclimated to the Prudhoe Road.
- Article on caribou across the global arctic.
- Rain-on-snow article.

Communications Committee Membership – all WG members who want to participate should. You would be committing to 2 teleconferences between January and June.

### **IX. Business Meeting**

Submit comments to BLM on Ambler Road SEIS as revised to include a paragraph about the fluctuation of the herd - MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to approve the SEIS Ambler Road comments as written by Tim Fullman. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 1; Abstain: 3

Submit comments to support retaining the withdrawal of D1 lands - MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comments written by Tim Fullman to support retaining the withdrawal of D1 lands. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 0; Abstain: 4

Send Darrel Vent as a Working Group Representative to the Board of Game Meeting - MOTION by Cyrus Harris, second by Neil DeWitt, to send Darrell Vent to the Board of Game Meeting to represent the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Write a letter to public safety officers around Anaktuvuk Pass - MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Cyrus Harris, to write a letter to public safety officers around Anaktuvuk Pass about non-local takes and ask for better enforcement. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Upload Conference Videos to Working Group Website - MOTION by Tim Fullman, second by Neil DeWitt, to upload as many conference videos as possible to the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group website. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Send a Working Group Representative to the Federal Subsistence Board Meeting - MOTION by Charlie Lean, second by Darrell Vent, to delegate the decision on working group representation at the Federal Subsistence Board meeting to the executive committee once more details are known. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Write a letter of support to the National Science Foundation - MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to write a letter of support to the National Science Foundation to support Arctic System Sciences: Combining data streams across scales to investigate threats to caribou in a rapidly changing Arctic. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Write letters to David Kilbourn Family, Benedict Jones, Elmer Seetot, Jr. and Pollock Simon, Sr. thanking them for their service on the Working Group - MOTION by Darrell Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to write letters to David Kilbourn Family, Benedict Jones, Elmer Seetot, Jr. and Pollock Simon, Sr. thanking them for their service on the Working Group as founding members. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Approval of 2022 WACH WG Meeting Summary (p. 179 in WG Binder) – MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Michael Stickman, to approve the 2022 WACH WG meeting summary. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Communications Committee Slate – MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to approve the Communications Committee slate to include Darrell Vent, Tim Fullman, John Wisniewski, Vern Cleveland, Tom Gray, Ben Child, Deb Lawton (ADF&G), Brittany Sweeney (FWS), Kyle Joly (NPS), and a BLM rep to be identified by Brittany Sweeney. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Executive Committee Membership Process – MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent to nominate executive committee members at Working Group Business Meetings and vote on the committee’s membership at that time. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

Executive Committee Membership Nomination – MOTION by Tim Fullman, second by Cyrus Harris to nominate Charlie Lean for a seat on the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee Membership Nomination – MOTION by Vida Coltrain, second by Tim Fullman to nominate Darrell Vent for a seat on the Executive Committee.

Tom Gray asked for unanimous consent and there were no objections.

2024 WACH Working Group Meeting – The Working Group plans to meet in-person on December 11-12, 2024, in Anchorage. The Technical Committee will meet on December 10<sup>th</sup> in Anchorage. MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Tom Gray, to approve the 2024 WACH WG Annual Meeting dates and location. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

**X. Adjourn** – MOTION by Tom Gray, second by Neil DeWitt, to adjourn the meeting. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.

### Motions Acted Upon at WACH Working Group Meeting

December 13-14, 2023

1. Membership Approvals: MOTION by Micky Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to approve the following primary and alternate members to the WACH Working Group – Seat 5 primary John Wisniewski; Seat 9 primary Jack Reakoff; Seat 9 alternate Darrell Vent; Seat 20 alternate Joseph Leavitt. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote.
2. Agenda Approval: MOTION by Cyrus Harris, second by Neil DeWitt, to approve the meeting agenda. Motion PASSED unanimously on a voice vote.
3. WACH Management Level, 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan: MOTION by Micky Stickman, second by Tom Gray, to accept the recommendation by the Technical Committee to set the Management Level for the Western Arctic Herd at “Preservative, Declining” per the 2019 WACH Cooperative Management Plan, Table 1. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 15; No: 0; Abstain: 0
4. Submit Comment to Board of Game Reaffirming Working Group’s Bag Limit Proposal: MOTION by Mickey Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group’s proposal (BOG Proposal 2) to the Board of Game to change harvest regulations to 4 caribou per person per year only one of which can be a cow. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 14; No: 1; Abstain: 0
5. Submit Comment to Board of Game Reaffirming Working Group’s Non-Resident Hunter Proposal: MOTION by Darrell Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group’s proposal (BOG Proposal 5) to the Board of Game to close caribou hunting to non-residents range-wide. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 9; No: 6; Abstain: 0
6. Submit Comment to Board of Game Regarding BOG Proposal 4 to Align U23 (Pt Hope) with 26A submitted by the North Slope F&G Advisory Committee: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Tim Fullman, to take no action on Proposal 4 with unanimous consent. Motion FAILED.
7. Submit Comment to Board of Game Regarding BOG Proposal 5 to Reduce Resident Harvest to 5/person, only 1 cow and create a NR registration permit for 400 hunters: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrel Vent, to take no action on Proposal 5. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 13; No: 1.
8. Submit Comment to Board of Game Regarding BOG Proposal 18 to Open 22A for Caribou Harvest: MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to oppose Proposal 18. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 3.
9. Submit Comment to Federal Subsistence Reaffirming Working Group’s Bag Limit Proposal (24-28): MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to reaffirm the Working Group’s proposal (FSB 24-28) to the Federal Subsistence Board to change harvest regulations to 4 caribou per person per year only one of which can be a cow. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 13; No: 1; Abstain: 0
10. Submit Comment to the Federal Subsistence Board Supporting Federal Proposal 24-30/31 (No non-federally qualified hunters for caribou August 1 to October 31 in Unit 23): MOTION by Darrel Vent, second by Cyrus Harris, to support Federal Proposal 24-30/31. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 10; No: 4; Abstain: 0
11. Submit comments to BLM on Ambler Road SEIS as revised to include a paragraph about the fluctuation of the herd: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to approve the SEIS Ambler Road comments as written by Tim Fullman. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 1; Abstain: 3

12. Submit comments to support retaining the withdrawal of D1 lands: MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Neil DeWitt, to submit comments written by Tim Fullman to support retaining the withdrawal of D1 lands. Motion PASSED on a roll call vote. Votes - Yes: 11; No: 0; Abstain: 4
13. Send Darrel Vent as a Working Group Representative to the Board of Game Meeting: MOTION by Cyrus Harris, second by Neil DeWitt, to send Darrell Vent to the Board of Game Meeting to represent the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
14. Write a letter to public safety officers around Anaktuvuk Pass: MOTION by Michael Stickman, second by Cyrus Harris, to write a letter to public safety officers around Anaktuvuk Pass about non-local takes and ask for better enforcement. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
15. Upload Conference Videos to Working Group Website: MOTION by Tim Fullman, second by Neil DeWitt, to upload as many conference videos as possible to the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group website. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
16. Send a Working Group Representative to the Federal Subsistence Board Meeting: MOTION by Charlie Lean, second by Darrell Vent, to delegate the decision on working group representation at the Federal Subsistence Board meeting to the executive committee once more details are known. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
17. Write a letter of support to the National Science Foundation: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to write a letter of support to the National Science Foundation to support Arctic System Sciences: Combining data streams across scales to investigate threats to caribou in a rapidly changing Arctic. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
18. Write letters to David Kilbourn Family, Benedict Jones, Elmer Seetot, Jr. and Pollock Simon, Sr. thanking them for their service on the Working Group: MOTION by Darrell Vent, second by Neil DeWitt, to write letters to David Kilbourn Family, Benedict Jones, Elmer Seetot, Jr. and Pollock Simon, Sr. thanking them for their service on the Working Group as founding members. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
19. Approval of 2022 WACH WG Meeting Summary: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Michael Stickman, to approve the 2022 WACH WG meeting summary. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
20. Communications Committee Slate: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent, to approve the Communications Committee slate to include Darrell Vent, Tim Fullman, John Wisniewski, Vern Cleveland, Tom Gray, Ben Child, Deb Lawton (ADF&G), Brittany Sweeney (FWS), Kyle Joly (NPS), and a BLM rep to be identified by Brittany Sweeney. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
21. Executive Committee Membership Process: MOTION by Neil DeWitt, second by Darrell Vent to nominate executive committee members at Working Group Business Meetings and vote on the committee's membership at that time. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.
22. Executive Committee Membership Nomination: MOTION by Tim Fullman, second by Cyrus Harris to nominate Charlie Lean for a seat on the Executive Committee.
23. Executive Committee Membership Nomination: MOTION by Vida Coltrain, second by Tim Fullman to nominate Darrell Vent for a seat on the Executive Committee. Tom Gray asked for unanimous consent and there were no objections.
24. Adjournment: MOTION by Tom Gray, second by Neil DeWitt, to adjourn the meeting. Motion PASSED unanimously by voice vote.