

Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve

2025 Fall Update

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Subsistence Resource Commission

Background

The Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) provides local subsistence users an opportunity to inform the management of subsistence resources in Gates of the Arctic and the surrounding area (Northwest Arctic – Game Management Unit 23, Western Interior – Units 24A, 24B, 24C, North Slope – Units 26A and 26B). Since the establishment of the Federal Subsistence Program in 1990, the SRC has made recommendations on fish and wildlife proposals directly to Regional Advisory Councils and the Federal Subsistence Board.

Membership

In total there are 9 members on the SRC. Regional Advisory Councils appoint three members to the SRC. These members provide an important link between the SRC and the Federal Subsistence Program. The Regional Advisory Councils that address issues in Gates of the Arctic include the Northwest Arctic RAC, the Western Interior RAC, and the North Slope RAC. In addition to the RAC appointments, three members of the SRC are appointed by the Governor of Alaska and three members are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior.

For more information, please contact Marcy Okada marcy_okada@nps.gov and (907) 455-0639

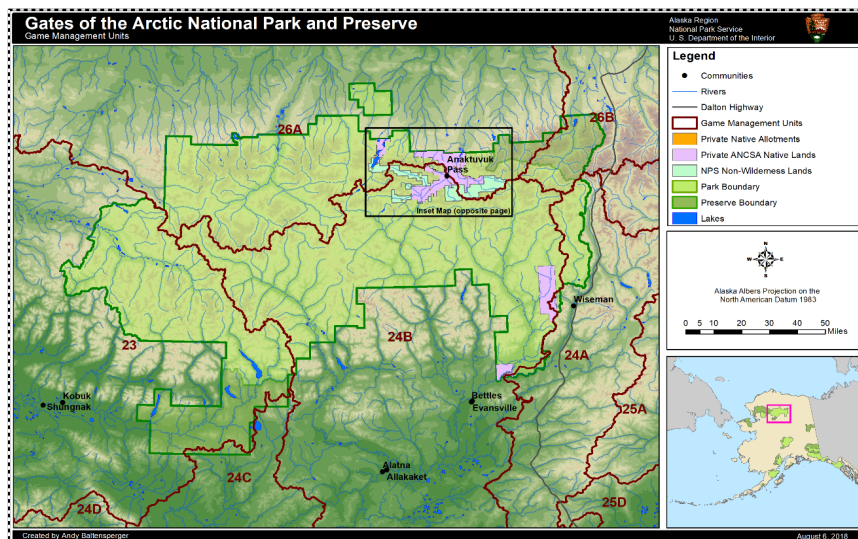


Figure 1. A map of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (green outline) and game management units (outlined in red)). The black dots represent resident zone communities.

Last Meeting

The Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission met via Teams and teleconference on April 16, 2025. There was much discussion on the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council's Draft Sheep Management Strategy, mainly focused on how the National Park Service monitors sheep populations and how the distance-sampling surveys are conducted, as well as the importance of population composition information. There were also Gates of the Arctic staff updates and a review of the subsistence management plan. The next SRC meeting is scheduled for November in Fairbanks. At this upcoming meeting, there will be another discussion on Dall's sheep management and updates on various research projects.

Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve

2025 Fall Update

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Western Arctic Caribou

Migration Timeline this Year

May 2025 - The cycle has begun again: the first solid indications of the Western Arctic Herd's spring migration started showing in May. This was about a week later than last year but a couple days earlier than 2023. Like 2023 and 2024, this winter was hard on Western Arctic caribou. In the past two winters (Nov-Apr), about 17% of the collared caribou died (which is well above normal). This past winter, the preliminary numbers indicated an even slightly higher mortality rate than the previous two winters. Given the high adult female mortality rate, it would not be unexpected if the herd has continued to decline. Caribou that wintered south of the Noatak River showed more movement than the others, with the exception of 1972 when they wintered south of the Red Dog road.

Early June – Calving season started with the majority of the herd in their calving grounds on the Utukok Uplands. Notably, there was a good number of caribou that were still pretty far south in early June.

Late June - While caribou, including the Western Arctic Herd, are known for their fidelity to their calving grounds, the most consistent movement the Western Arctic Herd undertakes each year is from the calving grounds cutting west across the Kukpowruk River by Igloo Mtn to the Lisburne area. This year was no different. Upon arrival, the herd tends to form massive aggregations in response to peak insect harassment. This is when the Alaska Department of Fish and Game conducts photo-censuses. Interestingly, we had more stragglers, north, east, and south of the main group, than we typically do. Most of the herd arrived in the Lisburne area in late June.

July - The herd came together and Alaska Department of Fish and Game was able to conduct a photo-census. With the newer techniques, an updated estimate of herd size should be available this fall. Typically, once the insect harassment lessens a bit,

the herd will move quickly eastward and then scatter.

Early August - The herd continued to stream east across the slopes of the northern Noatak boundary and into Gates of the Arctic. In past years, we've often seen the Western Arctic herd drift north soon after this type of movement. We didn't have any cross the Noatak River in July, which is something we've seen often in recent years.

Mid-August - Like in many years past, the Western Arctic herd started drifting north to the North Slope, once insect harassment lessened with cooler temps. In the past, this typically only lasts a short time and then the herd starts migrating south. Waiting to see what happens this year.



Figure 2. A mixed group of caribou in Kobuk Valley National Park (NPS/Kyle Joly)

For more information, please contact Kyle Joly
kyle_joly@nps.gov

Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve 2025 Fall Update

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Dall's Sheep

2025 Survey Summary

Background

The National Park Service conducted distance sampling surveys for Dall's sheep from July 5 – 11, 2025 in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Surveys were flown on BLM and State managed lands surrounding the Dalton Highway Management Corridor, the Itkillik Preserve area of northeast Gates of the Arctic (pink area), and the southeastern portion between the Dalton Highway and the John River (blue area). Population estimates will be generated and distributed this winter.



Figure 3. A Dall's sheep (NPS / JARED HUGHEY).

More Information

Zackary Delisle, Arctic Inventory and Monitoring Network (ARCN) Dall's sheep program lead, Zackary_Delisle@nps.gov
Eric Wald, ARCN Program Manager, Eric_Wald@nps.gov
<https://www.nps.gov/im/arcn/dallsheep.htm>

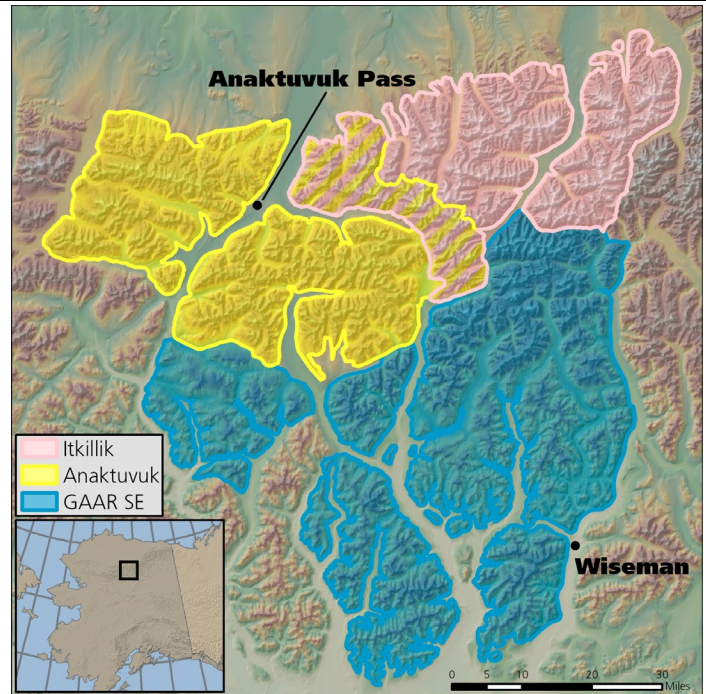


Figure 4. Map of Gates of the Arctic Park and Preserve Dall's sheep survey areas.

Brown Bear Book

A book titled *Brown Bears in Alaska's National Parks: Conservation of a Wilderness Icon* was recently published. Written by National Park Service staff across multiple Park units, this book focuses on bear biology, human-bear interactions, monitoring methods, and the relationship between Alaskan indigenous cultures and bears.

For more information, contact kyle_joly@nps.gov

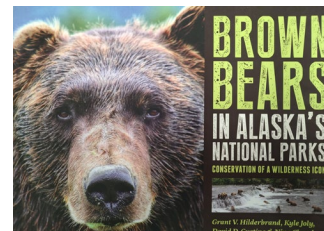


Figure 5. Book cover of *Brown Bears in Alaska's National Parks: Conservation of a Wilderness Icon*.