



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.

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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.

Previous Meeting

The Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission was not able to meet in early November 2025 as was planned due to the government shutdown. The SRC is scheduled to meet on April 8-9, 2026 in Fairbanks where they will discuss federal wildlife proposals that affect areas in or adjacent to the Park and Preserve. These comments will be submitted in time for the Federal Subsistence Board meeting that's scheduled during the week of April 20th. Also up for discussion are the Ambler Mining Access Road, the status of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, Dall's sheep management, research projects in partnership with affiliated communities and general updates from National Park Service staff.

Additionally, the SRC met via Teams on February 17 to discuss the Federal Subsistence Management Program Review and ultimately submitted comments on the main points of the Review.



Western Arctic Caribou

Migration Timeline Last Fall into Winter

Early September - Only 2 of the 100 collared caribou had crossed the Noatak River, which is very late. The bulk of the herd was northwest of the community of Noatak and had split, with some animals heading north. The thought was that these animals would winter on the North Slope.

November - Caribou were moving with some right by Onion Portage, but the bulk of the herd had been moving further to the west, by Kivalina and down towards Kotzebue. As is typical, some caribou were up by Wainwright. A few appeared to be heading towards Anaktuvuk Pass.

December - There was still a fair amount of movement for this late in the year. The big group of caribou that migrated by Kivalina had mostly made it across the Noatak River. The majority of those caribou were pushing southeast towards Noorvik. However, a fair number turned north after crossing the Noatak River. The Wainwright group of caribou had mostly moved along the coast to the southwest. Caribou were still moving towards Anaktuvuk Pass and a group moved towards Buckland.

January - There were more movements than typically seen in January, but most caribou were settling into an area in January. The lower Kobuk River was probably seeing the most caribou and activity in their areas.

Caribou Group Size Related to Seasonal Life Events

Caribou are a highly social member of the deer family and often form large groups. Group size is influenced by density-dependent factors, such as predation pressure, foraging conditions, herd size, and other factors. Understanding how caribou group sizes change over time can help biologists understand the ecology of the species and how best to manage them.

[Joly, K. 2025. Year-round variation in monthly and daily group size estimates of barren-ground caribou in east-central Alaska.](#) Journal of Zoology. DOI: 10.1111/jzo.70058.

What Determines Caribou Migration Strategies?

Caribou movements are largely influenced by migratory strategy, group size, and environmental conditions. Migratory caribou moved more than non-migratory caribou throughout the year, even during the non-migratory summer and winter months. This is likely related to a life history strategy to maximize their year-round energy intake. It may also be related to competition and larger groups depleting forage resources quicker. Shallower snow and warmer temperatures were also related to increased movements.

[Joly, K. 2025. Influence of migratory strategy, group size, and environmental conditions on the movements of caribou in eastern Alaska.](#) Animals 15(10): 1453.



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

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Dall's Sheep

2025 Survey Summary

Background

The National Park Service conducted an aerial survey for Dall's sheep from July 5 – 11, 2025. Two aircraft based out of Galbraith Lake surveyed two survey areas in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR), Itkillik Preserve and Southeast GAAR (Figure 2). The survey used a standardized distance sampling protocol. Accurate Dall's sheep abundance and demographic data are critical for management of Dall's sheep populations and their harvest.



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

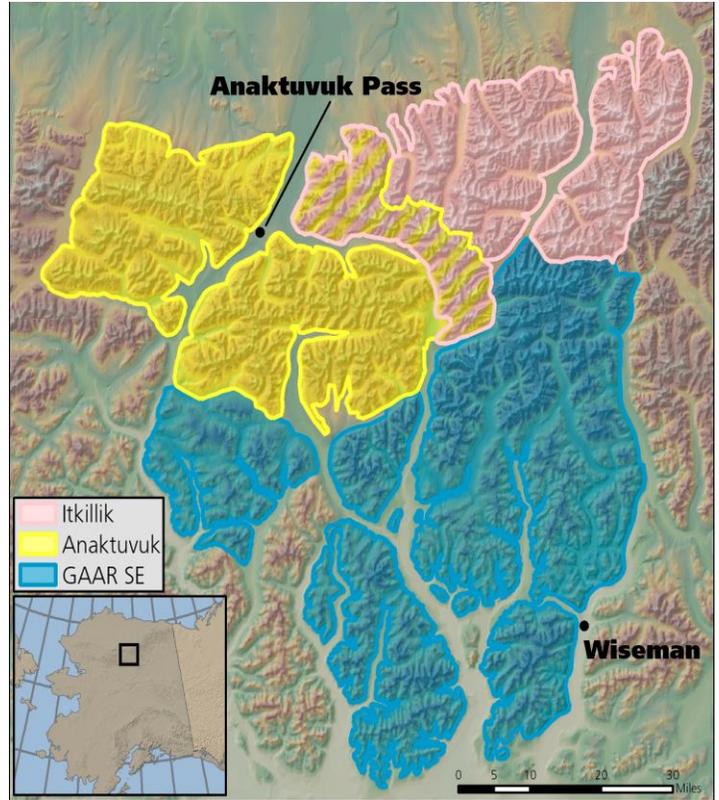


Figure 4. Map of Gates of the Arctic Park and Preserve Dall's sheep survey areas.

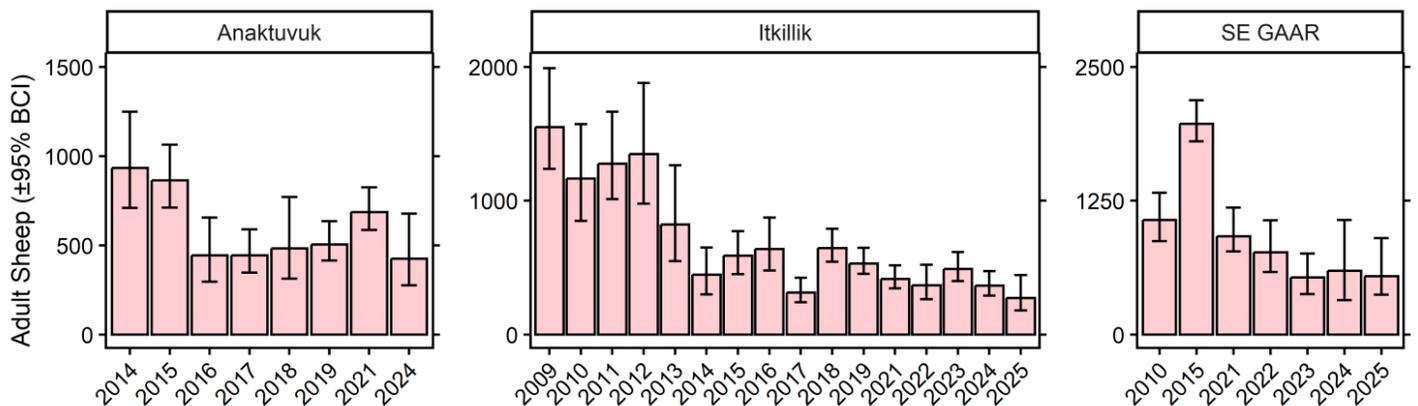


Figure 5. Estimated number of adult sheep in each survey area. Error bars indicate 95% Bayesian Credible Intervals (BCI). Note that surveys were not conducted in the Anaktuvuk survey area in 2025 but the graph of data through 2024 is included here for reference.



Figure 6. A group of Dall's sheep running through rocky terrain (NPS / DYLAN SCHERTZ).

Population Estimates

The estimated number of sheep in the Itkillik and SE GAAR were slightly lower than in 2024 and continue a trend of low estimates in recent years (Figure 5). The estimated ratio of lambs to ewe-like sheep was also lower than 2024 in both units, but this was expected as 2024 was one of the highest years for lamb:ewe-like sheep on record (Figure 8).



Figure 7. A Piper SuperCub, the survey aircraft typically used for Dall's sheep surveys (NPS / BRAD SHULTS).

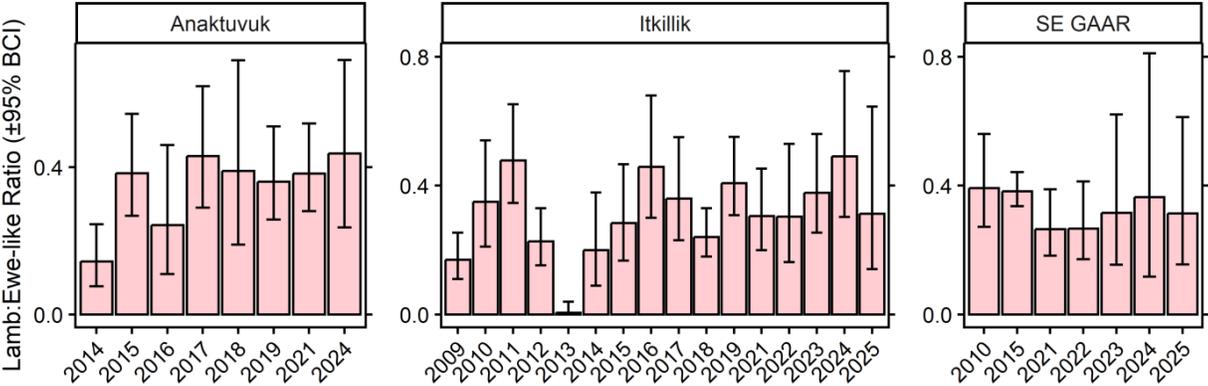


Figure 8. Estimated ratio of lambs to ewe-like sheep, an indicator of reproductive success. Error bars indicate 95% Bayesian Credible Intervals (BCI). Note that surveys were not conducted in the Anaktuvuk survey area in 2025 but the graph of data through 2024 is included here for reference.

For More Information

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<https://www.nps.gov/im/arcn/dallsheep.htm>

Arctic Brown Bears Den the Longest

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve lies entirely above the Arctic Circle and spans the central portion of the Brooks Range. On average, brown bears in the park spent 206 days a year in their dens. They enter their dens, on average, around September 30 and emerge around April 25. One bear pushed the physiological limit (241 days) that bears can remain in torpor by spending a remarkable 233 days (64% of the year) in its den. These are some of the longest denning durations ever reported in the world and reflect the difficult living conditions for bears in the Arctic. For more information, please contact Mat Sorum at mathew_sorum@nps.gov



Figure 9. On average, brown bears in the Brooks Range spend about 206 days a year in their dens. (NPS / Matt Cameron).