INTERAGENCY STAFF COMMITTEE
COMMENT ON WSA26-11

If the Board approves the request to increase the Unit 9C harvest limit on Federal lands from one to two caribou per hunter then subsistence opportunities would expand as the Kukaklek Shelf caribou population grows. It would also help reduce increasing pressure on the range's limited carrying capacity and make the hunt more efficient and economically feasible for federally qualified subsistence users. Because Katmai National Preserve is remote and accessible in winter by snowmachine or airplane only, allowing hunters to harvest two caribou per permit would help offset the substantial cost of reaching the hunt area while supporting a carefully managed, sustainable harvest. The change would also align Federal harvest limits and permit requirements for the Unit 9C winter caribou hunt with State regulations, reducing regulatory complexity. The in-season manager may announce season dates that align with the State hunt. The State will establish a harvest quota after completing the fall 2026 composition surveys; therefore, overharvest is not expected. Because Federal users would also hunt under State registration permit RC504, the Federal hunt would be subject to the State harvest quota.

Both OSM and the Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) recognize that growth in the Kukaklek Shelf caribou population may support revising the Section 804 restriction, which currently limits hunting opportunities to Igiugig and Kokhanok. However, although the population has grown enough to support increased harvest, it has not grown enough to support a subsistence priority for all 23 communities with customary and traditional use determinations for caribou in Unit 9C.

The Council recommended that eight communities be eligible to harvest caribou in Katmai National Preserve under Federal subsistence regulations: Igiugig, Iliamna, King Salmon, Kokhanok, Levelock, Naknek, Newhalen, and South Naknek. These are the same eight communities identified in the 2024 OSM Section 804 analysis as having demonstrated dependence on caribou in Unit 9C. Five of those communities— Igiugig, Iliamna, Kokhanok, Levelock, and Newhalen—also demonstrated harvest and use of caribou in the Katmai National Preserve hunt area. The Council further provided justification that they believe the residents of King Salmon, Naknek, and South Nakenek have hunted caribou in the area of the preserve in the past and should also be included in this hunt opportunity.

Harvest data from this State registration permit will need to be shared with the federal inseason manager for Katmai National Preserve in order to manage this hunt on federal lands under a single State registration permit for the upcoming 2026/27 winter hunt.