



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News from Selawik Refuge

Northwest Alaska Caribou Update 2022

News on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd

Latest Count: 188,000 Caribou



How many caribou are in the Western Arctic Herd?

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What You Can Do:

- 188,000 animals in July 2021.
- A decline from the last count of 244,000 in 2019.
- The herd declined by 23% (56,000 animals) in 2 years.
- The last time the Western Arctic Herd had fewer than 200,000 animals was over 40 years ago.

Population numbers come from photocensus (aerial photography) counts conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

Concern for Cows



Biologists keep track of adult cow survival rate as a key sign of herd health. The survival rate from 2017-20 was 73%, which is below average.

Cows are the breeding stock of the caribou herd. At their December 2021 meeting, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group discussed their concern for cows, and how later migrations might lead to more cow harvests because bulls are in rut by the time the herd is within reach of many communities. Several Working Group members emphasized that taking fewer cows is one way hunters can help the herd at this time.

Other factors look less worrying: the number of calves being born, how many calves are surviving their first year, and the ratio of bulls to cows in the herd are all closer to (or above) their long-term average.

Take only what you need

Reduce harvest of cows where possible

Report your caribou harvest to help managers understand subsistence needs.

Contact Alaska Department of Fish and Game for reporting:

- Kotzebue: 442-3420
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Photo of caribou cow and calf above courtesy Matthew Richardson/flickrCC

Herd Management Moves to Preservative



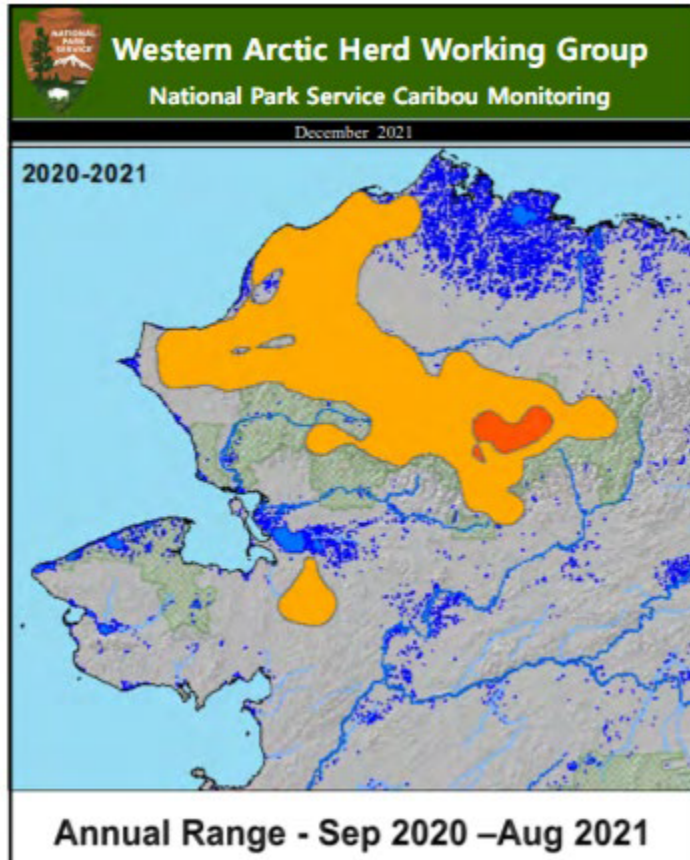
The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group changed the herd's management level from Conservative/Declining to **Preservative/Declining** at their December 2021 meeting, indicating more concern over where the herd is headed.

Management level is determined by the population of the herd, the population trend (i.e. are numbers going up or down), and how well cows and calves are surviving.

This change in management level doesn't automatically trigger different hunting regulations, but recommends actions that might be needed to help the herd. Any changes will have to be considered by the Alaska Board of Game and/or the Federal Subsistence Board. Advisory committees and councils will likely be discussing this topic at upcoming meetings.

You can [view the Working Group's cooperative herd management plan](#) to learn more about Preservative management.

"Home on the Range" Continues to Change



The above map produced by the National Park Service shows where Western Arctic Herd caribou spent the most time from 2020 to 2021. The darker orange, which shows the highest concentration of use, was in the central Brooks Range mountains.

Collared caribou are also moving southward and crossing the Kobuk River later in the fall. They are not going as far south as in previous decades; many caribou aren't crossing the Kobuk River at all.

This newsletter was written by Selawik National Wildlife Refuge with shared information from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, National Park Service, and Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group.

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